South Haven Tribune

$3

November 30, 2025

Don Campbell / HP file photo

The Mitten Children's Museum in South Haven, pictured above in 2024, will close by the end of this year once the building's lease is up.

A final admission

Mitten Children's Museum in SH to close by 2026

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The Mitten Children's Museum in South Haven is closing its doors by the end of this year when the building lease expires.

The museum opened as a second location to the Forever Curious Children's Museum in Fennville in 2022.

"The Mitten is kind of an evolution of a museum that started in Fennville and it was called Forever Curious. It was there for like 15 years," Museum Board President Pam Leiter said. "Then the previous executive director wanted to open the museum in South Haven, and she called it the Mitten."

The museum, located at the historic Conger House in South Haven, had a Michigan theme that featured a variety of interactive exhibits including the auto industry, Motown music, vet clinic, Lake Michigan and water safety.

Leiter said they operated the two museums until it became too costly and had to close the Fennville location, sell the property and focus on the South Haven location.

"We found that we would have great admissions during summers and a lot of our business was, tourist families," Leiter said. "In the school year, things would really sharply drop off and it wasn't sustainable to operate just on admissions alone."

The main issue the museum faced was not being able to afford the property, Leiter said.

"The big thing was we couldn't find affordable space and our lease was up at the end of this year," she said. "I mean, that was really the driving force, because for four years I looked at properties all around the area and had conversations with various people, but we couldn't find anything that was going to be less than $1 million."

Leiter said they had been searching for a different building, not just for affordable but accessibility for visitors.

"We have that building that we're in ... it's a pretty old building, it's called the Conger House," Leiter said. "Well, it's not wheelchair accessible and we never really wanted to stay there very long. We thought we would be there briefly and then find a better location that was available to kids

See **MITTEN**, page A2

Don Campbell / HP file photo

The Mitten Children's Museum in South Haven featured a variety of rooms for children to explore.

Photo provided

A child takes part in PlayPalooza hosted by the Mitten Children's Museum in South Haven in 2023.

South Haven promotes DeBoer as police chief

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The city of South Haven has named Adam DeBoer as its new police chief.

According to a news release, the promotion is in recognition of his work in the interim role as police chief.

DeBoer has served with the South Haven Police Department for more than 20 years. He joined the department in 2004 as a police officer and was promoted to sergeant in 2017. Since April of this year, DeBoer has served as the interim police chief.

"Adam is a dedicated and experienced leader who knows and cares deeply about South Haven, its people and the department," South Haven City Manager Kate Hosier said in the release. "He's done an incredible job for the past seven months as he's worked to strengthen the relationship between our officers, residents, businesses and visitors while advancing the department's commitment to public safety and community policing."

In his role as interim chief, he oversaw all police department operations, including community event planning and continued cooperation with local law enforcement agencies.

"As interim chief, DeBoer demonstrated his leadership abilities by managing complex initiatives and enhancing department operations," the release stated.

Additionally, DeBoer reinstated several positions, including the school resource officer. He advanced two new officers through field training and helped enroll a police recruit at the Grand Valley State University Police Academy. The new recruit recently graduated and will begin field training in the next few weeks.

He enrolled officers in 35 classes through the West Michigan Training Consortium, covering a broad spectrum of law enforcement topics, while participating personally in leadership development programs.

"DeBoer was instrumental in advancing the department's Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police accreditation and

See **DEBOER**, page A2

LMC officials to present on campus security

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI
For the Tribune

Lake Michigan College's student life team will highlight efforts to improve campus safety and security practices next year at a national conference in Kansas City, Mo.

The news coincides with LMC's observation of Clery Compliance Week, a national event held in early October on college and university campuses nationwide, as Melissa Grau, dean of student life and engagement, told LMC board members last week.

This year marks LMC's second major participation in Clery Week, which takes its name from the Jeanne Clery Act, a federal law requiring colleges and universities to report recent crime statistics, and publicly disclose them, Grau said.

"I love coming to have conversations with you, because I get to share all the good news – and that makes me happy," Grau told the board. "The good news is that we've done a lot of collaborating, because obviously, compliance is very important to us. But what's even more important to us is educating our students, and getting them to understand their safety."

Leah Coyle, director of student life and residence, joined Sabrina Heinrichs, administrative assistant for accreditation of strategic projects and quality, in detailing the college's efforts to improve safety and security awareness among LMC's student population.

Together, they worked on those efforts as part of a committee with Melissa Emery, dean of accreditation, projects and quality.

"The thought process was that we were going to transform our policy, to promote better participation, and better prevention," Coyle said. "We didn't want to just check the box for Clery compliance, because that's what so many other institutions do."

LMC President Trevor Kubatzke voiced his appreciation for their work.

See **SECURITY**, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 126th Year

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OBITUARIES

Shaun Zeigler

Sept. 17, 1982 – Nov. 23, 2025

Shaun Leroy Zeigler, 43, of Lawrence, Mich. passed away on Sunday, Nov. 23, 2025. He was born on Sept. 17, 1982, in Hot Springs, Ark. to Cecil William Higgs and Regina Gail (Anderson) Zeigler.

Shaun is survived by his father Cecil Higgs.

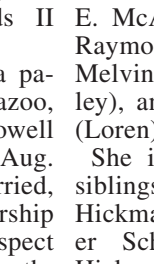
Shaun is preceded by his mother, Regina Zeigler, brothers; Johnny Alexander and Jeremy Zeigler and sister; Sissy Alexander.

To view Shaun's personal web page please visit www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel of Starks Family Funeral Homes & Cremation Services, 269-637-0333.

Ruth Richards

July 19, 1935 – Nov. 13, 2025



Ruth Ann Frakes Richards, 90, of Kalamazoo, Mich., passed away peacefully on Nov. 13, 2025, at StoryPoint senior living community, surrounded by the love of family that she so cherished throughout her remarkable life.

Born on July 19, 1935, in Hiawatha, Kansas, Ruth came into the world during the challenging years of the Great Depression. The daughter of hardworking farmers, she learned early the values of resilience, determination and the importance of family bonds.

In 1940, her family moved to White Cloud, Kansas, before making the significant journey to Kalamazoo, Mich. in 1950, where her father sought better opportunities for his family. This move would ultimately shape the rest of Ruth's life in her adopted Michigan home.

Ruth's life was defined by love, devotion and an unwavering commitment to family. Ruth was blessed with three children whom she loved and raised with devotion: Carrie J. Behringer (Donald), Tammy K. Hill (Eric) and Thomas L. Richards II (Tricia).

While working at a paper factory in Kalamazoo, Ruth met Thomas Lowell Richards Sr., and on Aug. 18, 1967, they married, beginning a partnership built on mutual respect and shared values. Together, Ruth and Thomas created a warm and welcoming home in South Haven, Mich., where they moved in 1970 and where Ruth lovingly resided for over five decades until 2023.

As a devoted homemaker, Ruth found her greatest joy in nurturing her family. Her home was her canvas, always immaculate and welcoming. She took pride in her landscaping, cultivating beautiful flowers and plants that added warmth and color to her home. Her attention to detail created a peaceful sanctuary where family memories bloomed. Her kitchen was the heart of the home, filled with the aromas of home-cooked meals that brought everyone together.

Ruth possessed a rare gift for making everyone feel valued and loved. She was the anchor of her family, a wonderful mother who guided with gentle wisdom and an exceptional grandmother who delighted in every moment spent with her grandchildren.

Her legacy lives on in the six grandchildren she adored: Taylor A. Cammire (Austin), Samantha N. Hill, Ryleigh F. Richards, Colin D. Richards, Jade E. Bowman (Miles) and Ross E. Behringer (Celeste). She was also blessed to know and love her three great-grandchildren: Hugh C. Behringer, Theodore J. Bowman, and Nora J. Cammire.

Throughout her 90 years, Ruth exemplified grace, kindness, and dedication. Whether tending to her beloved flowers, gathering with friends, or simply being present for those she loved, she approached life with quiet strength and genuine warmth. Her family was not just her priority – it was her joy and her life's greatest accomplishment.

Ruth was preceded in death by her spouse, Thomas Lowell Richards Sr. and her siblings Harold V. Frakes (Judy), Dorothy E. McAlister (Frederick), Raymond Frakes (Katie), Melvin D. Frakes (Shirley), and Twila J. Silman (Loren).

She is survived by her siblings, Norma J. Schlax Hickman (widow of Roger Schlax and Donald Hickman) and Richard A. Frakes (Shirley); her three children; six grandchildren; three great-grandchildren and numerous nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends whose lives she touched with her gentle spirit.

Ruth Ann Richards lived a full and meaningful life, one measured not in grand gestures but in countless acts of love, in flowers tended, in meals shared, and in the enduring strength of the family she built. She will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

The family wishes to thank the compassionate staff at StoryPoint senior living community for their excellent care and kindness during Ruth's final years.

Please visit Ruth's memorial webpage to share condolences and memories with her family at www.Langelands.com

Photo provided

Despite snowy conditions and blustery weather, parents and their children participated in the Mitten Children's Museum Easter egg hunt on March 23, 2024, at South Beach.

MITTEN

From page A1

with disabilities and we just couldn't find anything affordable."

Even if the museum found an affordable option, Leiter said they needed someone who could handle applying for grants and developing a donor base.

"While we did some of it, it really wasn't enough to make the museum sustainable," she said in reference to grant writing. "A museum like ours can't afford to pay very much for an executive director, and we're asking a lot."

The board decided at the beginning of the year that they would begin the closing process after the summer season had wrapped up.

"We pretty much had this in mind at the beginning of the year," Leiter said. "We decided this year that we would do two major community events that we offered free of charge. One was the Easter egg hunt and the other was our annual PlayPalooza event, which we used to do as a fundraiser. This year we did it as a free event, partially sponsored by the community foundation grant that we got."

Looking ahead, Leiter said the museum will have mobile, rotating exhibits throughout the year.

"We will have three or four mobile exhibits next year that we hope to be able to have in a couple different locations in South Haven," Leiter said. "We're talking with various partners that we could set up there, maybe for three months here, three months there – kind of just be rotating until somebody comes along and wants to resurrect everything, put everything back together."

Leiter said she is hopeful someone in the future will help bring the museum back to a more permanent state.

"We're packing everything up so that it can be easily resurrected. We're hopeful that somebody from the community will say that they have got a great idea," she said. "We're leaving a reasonable amount of money in a bank account so, somebody could conceivably reopen."

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

DEBOER

From page A1

updating operational policies and software," the release stated.

DeBoer was present for community meetings/regional events and coordinated officer participation in community initiatives such as National Night Out and Family Fun Fest.

"I am deeply honored to serve as the South Haven police chief," DeBoer said in the release. "I want to thank the community for their trust and support. Our department is built on a foundation of service, and I am eager to lead our dedicated officers as we work together to keep our neighborhoods safe and strengthen our connection with the people we serve."

SECURITY

From page A1

"Having been in this business a long time – this is the first place I ever worked, that actually did something like this. Usually, it was, 'Put a flyer on the wall, and check the box,'" he said.

The trio will review their efforts in a presentation called "Pizza, Policy and Prevention: How Clery Transformed Campus Safety," at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) conference in March.

"We submitted a proposal, and got selected. Not only are we recognized here in Michigan, as a first, but they want us to educate on a national level of what we've been doing. So we are super thrilled about that," Coyle said.

Getting students to follow basic security practices – such as keeping doors locked – is one of the cornerstones of Clery Week, Coyle told the board.

"Unfortunately for Jeanne Clery, her door was not locked the night she was sexually assaulted and killed. So we want to make sure, in our residence hall, that all doors are locked," she said.

One of the major initiatives is "Delivery for Clery," a program that focuses on checking locks and door handles, to make sure that they're working, and being used correctly, Coyle said.

Last year's inspection at Beckwith Hall found 54.7 percent of its doors were unlocked, which fell to 24.5 percent, after the 2024 campaign – and again to 9 percent, after this year's observances.

Students who kept their doors locked were eligible to enter a gift card drawing from Silver Beach Pizza, which sponsors Clery Week at LMC, Coyle said.

The Clery Committee held a pizza party for its kickoff event, since Clery's assailant managed to get into her dorm by keeping her doors open with pizza boxes, Heinrichs said.

Other featured events of the 2024 Clery campaign included efforts to raise awareness of LMC's "blue lights," or emergency call stations, Coyle said.

"Many students had no idea that they go directly to 911 – they thought it would just be our security on campus," she said.

The blue light campaign wound up reaching around 160 students last year, improving to 285 for this year's event, she added.

LMC also rolled out an anti-hazing initiative this year, reflecting the addition of new language to the Clery Act along those lines, Coyle said.

The 2025 campaign also included a hazing "myth-busting" program, and the posting of red flags around campus for students, who could switch them to a green one, after they signed an anti-hazing pledge.

"In under two hours, all the red flags on campus turned green, because they believe in stopping hazing as much as we do," Coyle said. "So it was just really great to see our community have this belief systen that we have, that hazing is not tolerated here at Lake Michigan College."

The committee also worked to deputize resident assistants in campus security procedures, which gives students a resource to report crimes, while reinforcing the message that safety is everyone's job, Heinrichs said.

As a result, Heinrichs said LMC has now boosted its number of trained campus authorities from 20 to 120 people.

The Clery Committee now has a student representative, to give them a voice in whatever programming it does – including podcasts or videos it may produce.

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Diane and Lisa to perform annual holiday concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Diane Van Deurzen and Lisa Otey will bring their jazzy, bluesy holiday music to First Congregational UCC in South Haven.

According to a news release, the concert will begin at 6 p.m on Dec. 5.

"Known around the world for their beautiful harmonies and fun, high energy performances at jazz and blues festivals, clubs and concert halls from Paris to Sydney, Diane and Lisa have recently made their home in St. Joe," the release stated.

The musical duo lived in Tucson, Ariz. for many years and received numerous awards, including being inducted into the Arizona Blues Hall of Fame.

"Whenever these two artists perform together, people comment on their easy rapport and emotional connection," Tucson Citizen Chuck Graham said in the release. "Otey's piano and vocals are hot and steamy. Van Deurzen sings sweetly. Together they blend like a musical cappuccino with extra foam on top."

Since arriving in St. Joe in 2021, Diane and Lisa have quickly made a name for themselves in the area, singing at vineyards, breweries and special events around West Michigan.

Their holiday concert has become an annual tradition at First Congregational UCC in South Haven, where they also work as music directors.

At this celebration of the season, attendees can expect to hear classics like "Winter Wonderland", upbeat tunes like "Swingin' Them Jingle Bells", Diane and Lisa's original swing number, "Meet Me Under the Mistletoe" from their holiday CD, and "smash-ups" like Diane's arrangement of "Silent Night" with Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."

Tickets for Diane and Lisa's Holiday Concert are $20 at the door and free for children 12 and under.

For more concert information, call Diane and Lisa at (269) 637-3804 (opt. 5).

To find out more about their music, go to www.dianeandlisa.com.

Photo provided

Diane Van Deurzen and Lisa Otey will bring their jazzy, bluesy holiday music to First Congregational UCC in South Haven for a special holiday concert on Dec. 5.

South Haven seniors receive $75 thousand in local scholarships

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Community Foundation gives graduating seniors from South Haven High School the opportunity to be awarded $75,000 in local scholarships.

According to a news release, these scholarships, with the support of South Haven Public Schools, are awarded every spring.

"These scholarships are awarded from one or more of five endowed scholarships held by the Community Foundation or from one of twenty other scholarships offered by businesses, local organizations, or area families," the release stated.

All 25 of these scholarship opportunities are available through one online application process.

The application, developed by a company called Awardspring, will be available for seniors to begin filling out on Dec. 15 and be completed by March 1st, 2026.

One application will lead to students qualifying for all of the available scholarships.

"To date, roughly 120 South Haven graduates have received scholarships since the initiation of the Awardspring application process," the release stated.

Three of the South Haven scholarship winners include:

■ **Zachary Emenhizer** – Jensen Family Scholarship South Haven Community Memorial Scholarship and Grace Calvin Scholarship

Emenhiser received two scholarships from the South Haven Foundation in 2022 prior to beginning his studies at Ferris State University.

In 2022, he graduated from South Haven High School with both a diploma and an associate degree in Mechatronics from Lake Michigan College.

In 2021, Emenhiser's welding instructor at Lake Michigan College recommended the Welding Engineering Technology program at Ferris State University. He was able to transfer as a second-year student and earn an associate degree in Welding Technology within his first year at Ferris State University.

Since attending Ferris State University, he has completed two internships at John Deere.

In the summer of 2024, Emenhiser worked as a Welding Engineering Intern at Davenport Works in Iowa, developing welding procedures for Articulated Dump Trucks.

In the summer of 2025, he joined John Deere's Robotics and Innovation Group, supporting Harvester Works in East Moline, Ill., where he contributed to the creation of robotic systems for implementation at Harvester Works.

"The scholarships from the South Haven Community Foundation, along with opportunities provided by South Haven High School and the community, have enabled Zachary not only to persevere but to thrive as a young individual," the release stated. "He expresses gratitude for the support received throughout his academic career and hopes that future students will be able to benefit from similar opportunities."

■ **Katherine Hartmann** – 2024 AAUW Luminary Award recipient.

Hartmann attends Hope College and majors in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

"Being able to attend Hope College has allowed her to get involved in biochemistry research which has greatly impacted the quality of her education and has directed what she wants to do after finishing her undergraduate degree," the release stated. "The AAUW scholarship allowed her to follow her passion into research and for that she is incredibly thankful."

■ **Jessica Arvizu** – 2022 AAUW Pathfinder Scholarship and 2022Grace Calvin Scholarship Awardee

Throughout high school, in addition to working at Meijer and at Jellystone Park Campground, Arvizu enjoyed helping with the Laundry Project, a service started by her mother. The project helps migrant and seasonal families pay for their laundry.

"I like helping others live a little easier," Arvizu said in the release. "It's rewarding to know that instead of worrying about paying to do laundry, these families can use that money for other necessities."

As a first-generation college student, she received the 2022 AAUW SH Pathfinder Award and was accepted to Michigan State University. She was also awarded a scholarship from the Grace Calvin Scholarship endowment, the largest held by the South Haven Area Community Foundation.

Throughout college, she has been on the Dean's List every semester, thus qualifying for the $1,500 AAUW SH Achievement Award her sophomore, junior and senior year, resulting in a total of $6,000 in scholarships from AAUW South Haven.

Arvizu is now able to complete her degree from Michigan State University a semester early and graduate at the end of Fall Semester 2025.

She is currently interning at the Lansing Refugee Development Center, where she works with refugee children in grades K-12 to support their academic and social-emotional growth as they settle into America.

"This experience has deepened my passion for helping children succeed, particularly those facing unique barriers," Arvizu said in the release. "Throughout the rest of this summer and fall semester, I will continue this work while completing my undergraduate degree."

After graduating in December, she plans to work full-time while applying to the Master of Social Work programs to begin the following semester.

"My goal is to become a school social worker, where I can advocate for students and create inclusive environments that help every child thrive," Arvizu said in the release. "I want to thank the members of AAUW for your financial assistance throughout college. I greatly appreciate your support in helping me complete my education."

SH chamber launches community shop challenge

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently kicked off the holiday shopping season on Small Business Saturday with a fun, community-wide "Shop Small Challenge."

According to a news release, the challenge is running from Nov. 29 through Dec. 7 and is designed to encourage residents and visitors to support local businesses during the busiest shopping time of the year.

Participant also have a chance to win exclusive Ice Breaker merchandise.

Participants can enter by sharing a photo of their local shopping haul on Facebook and tagging both the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce and the business where they shopped.

Each post with both tags counts as an official entry in the prize drawing. One lucky winner will take home a limited-edition Ice Breaker hoodie.

Shoppers may post multiple times throughout the challenge to support additional businesses and earn more entries. Purchases made at any South Haven small business, boutiques, specialty shops, markets, restaurants and holiday pop-ups qualify.

"The chamber hopes the promotion will strengthen the Shop Small movement, boost holiday-season visibility for local entrepreneurs and remind the community that every purchase makes a difference," the release stated.

For more information, contact the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce at 269-637-5171 or visit southhavenmi.com.

Paw Paw Community Chorus presents Christmas concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW —The Paw Paw Community Chorus will present their Annual Christmas Concert on Dec. 7.

According to a news release, the concert will take place at 4 p.m. at the Paw Paw United Methodist Church, located at 420 W. Michigan Ave.

The chorus, under the direction of Theresa Vaughn, will be accompanied on piano by Evonne Heystek.

The following selections will be presented by the chorus:

■ "We Are Waiting" by Sally K. Albrecht, Charles Wesley, & Jay Althouse

■ "There Is Faint Music" by Nancy Buckley & Dan Forrest

■ "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song) by Amy grant & Chris Eaton/Arr. by Roger Emerson

■ "Hark, the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes" by Mary Lynn Lightfoot

■ "Bring Us Hope" by Ruth Elaine Schram

■ "In December" by Jay Althouse

■ "Sending You a Little Christmas" by Jim Brickman, Victoria Shaw & Billy Mann/Arr. by Jay Althouse

■ "On With the Snow" (A Medley of "Sleigh Ride", "Winter Wonderland", & Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!") Arr. by Douglas E Wagner

■ "Ring in the Holidays" by Greg Gilpin

"Although there is no admission charge for this concert, voluntary donations are very much appreciated," the release stated.

Advent calendars offer personalized ways to count down to Christmas

By KIM COOK
Associated Press

Not so many years ago, a typical advent calendar was a basic cardboard box containing some chocolates or other candies behind little daily windows.

Today, advent calendars have evolved into creatively designed collections that dispense items ranging from pet toys to soaps, fishing equipment to art supplies. They make for festive decor, and appeal to our love of ritual, surprise and small things.

Of course, if you're gifting an advent calendar, you'll want to give it early, in time for your recipients to count down the days to Christmas or a milestone.

Here are some countdown calendars that cater to different interests when promising daily doses of joy.

For pet people

Because they've been (mostly) good boys and girls this year, consider a daily treat calendar for the household's pets.

■ Petco's got Merry Makings' feline calendar, with 12 days of catnip goodies and toys behind the doors of a cute cottage. There's one for dogs, too, with biscuits, chewies and small plush toys. *$25-$30.*

■ New York-based dog-snack maker Bocce's Bakery has a 12-day calendar containing their signature wheat-, corn- and soy-free treats, made with ingredients like peanut butter, banana and chickpeas. *$14.*

■ A cat calendar at Trader Joe's has freeze-dried sweet potato and salmon treats, while their dog version is all about the chicken – also freeze-dried. *$7.99.*

For gardeners and makers

What nature lover wouldn't love a pretty calendar with different kinds of flower seeds?

■ Terrain has a box of seven seed bombs, each packaged in a decorative ornament – bees, butterflies, bunnies and birds among them. Hang them on the tree until planting season, then watch your pot or garden as chamomile, clovers, coriander, marigold and other pollinator-friendly wildflowers greet the spring. *$48.*

■ Needlecraft artist Amanda Watson in Bend, Oregon, created a calendar you stitch yourself – one new design each day from Dec. 1 through Christmas. It's an embroidery project even newbies can handle, and the finished artwork could be framed, or turned into a tote or pillow. *$45.*

■ A fun one for crafty kids: Mondo Llama's 25 Days of Christmas Crafts calendar, with all the sticks, foam and felt pieces, mini markers, googly eyes and more to make a bunch of cute holiday crafts. *$30.*

■ Slots in Uncommon Goods' Craft Project calendar hold your finished buildings so you can assemble a colorful village to display throughout the holidays; the kit includes paint markers, watercolors, glittery gel pens and more. *$95.*

Indoor and outdoor fun

■ Kids 8 and up would have a great time messing around with the Experiment a Day Science Advent Calendar from Thames & Kosmos, a science education-focused toys and games company. Supplies are included for chemistry, biology and physics experiments. *Uncommon Goods, $40.*

■ Also from Thames & Kosmos is an advent calendar version of its escape-room board games. Exit: The Game involves an intergalactic race, and each day offers a clue to get to the end. *$49.95.*

■ Colitt has a calendar for fishing fans: 24 reusable lures come in a calendar box featuring a fierce denizen of the deep on the cover. *$54.99.*

■ The Purple Cow's 24 Family Games calendar has brainteasers, dice, and outdoor and nostalgic activities for the gang to enjoy. *$40.*

■ And for those who love "Wicked," there's Centric Beauty's "Wicked"-themed advent calendar, with sparkly, shimmery balms, powders and stick-ons for lips, eyes and nails. *$16.49.*

South Haven Tribune

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0900 LEGALS

PUBLIC NOTICE

The South Haven Township Board of Review will meet on: Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at 11am at the Township Hall 09761 Blue Star Hwy South Haven, Michigan. The purpose of this meeting is to correct qualified errors. NO VALUATION APPEALS CAN BE HEARD. The July and December Boards of Review have different authorities than the March Board of Review. The July and December Boards of Review meet to correct Qualified Errors, and to consider appeals related to the Principal Residence Exemption, Qualified Agricultural Exemption, Taxable Value Uncapping, the Qualified Start-up Business Exemption, and Poverty Exemptions.

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0900 LEGALS

CASCO TOWNSHIP, ALLEGAN COUNTY
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Planning Commission of Casco Township will conduct a public hearing and regular meeting concerning the following matters on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave, South Haven, MI 49090.

Under Canvas Inc. (Michael Hilbert) has petitioned to amend the site plan for special use permit – campground - to eliminate 4 sites and construct a kitchen at 154 68th Street, 02-032-001-00.

Lubbers Farms LLC (Tim Lubbers) has petitioned to construct a building at V/L (approx 530) 68th St 0302-020-002-00.

Any other business that may come before the Planning Commission

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the application packet can be reviewed at the Casco Township Hall during regular business hours at 7104 107th Ave, South Haven or by contacting the Zoning Administrator for an electronic copy 1-800-626-5964 mtsallegan@frontier.com
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that written comments may be submitted to Clerk at the Township Hall, by mail (to address below), or email to the zoning administrator, mtsallegan@frontier.com. All written comments must be submitted no later than 4:00pm the day preceding the public hearing (Tues Dec 16, 4p)
Casco Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services to individuals with disabilities at the hearing upon seven (7) days' notice to the Casco Township Clerk.

Rachel Ridley
Casco Township Clerk
7104 107th Ave,
South Haven MI 49090
269-637-4441

Tasha Smalley
Zoning Administrator
1-800-626-5964

RESERVE THIS SPACE TODAY!

PUBLIC/LEGAL NOTICES

To place a public notice, please send your requests to **legals@pmginmi.com.**

Please allow 48 hours to process, larger legals may need at least four business days.

NOTICE OF ORDINANCE ADOPTION: ORDINANCE TO IMPOSE A MORATORIUM ON THE ISSUANCE OF PERMITS, LICENSES OR APPROVALS FOR SHORT-TERM RENTALS

On the 18th day of November 2025, Columbia Township, Van Buren County (the "Township") adopted Ordinance No. 2025-003, Ordinance to Impose a Moratorium on the Issuance of Permits, Licenses, or Approvals for Short Term Rentals (the "Ordinance"). The following is a summary of the Ordinance. A true copy of the Ordinance is available at Township Hall, 53053 County Road 388, Grand Junction, MI.
Section 1. Definition. This section defines certain terms used in the ordinance.
Section 2. Findings. Among other things, this section states that the Township wishes to adopt certain regulations to control the establishment of Short-Term Rentals to better protect the public health, safety, and welfare of Township residents. This section states that the Township finds that imposing a temporary moratorium on Short-Term Rental permits, licenses, and approvals is reasonable and necessary.
Section 3. Moratorium. This section imposes a moratorium upon the issuance of any and all permits, licenses or approvals for any property subject to or under the jurisdiction of the Township for the establishment of Short-Term Rentals, so long as this Ordinance is in effect.
Section 4: Term of Moratorium; Renewal. This section provides that the moratorium will remain in effect for six (6) months following the effective date of the Ordinance, or until a Short-Term Rental ordinance takes effect, whichever occurs first. Before this moratorium expires, the Township may by resolution extend the moratorium as appropriate to allow sufficient time to complete its ordinance. If an extension is adopted, the Township will publish notice of the extension.
Section 5. Validity and Severability. This section provides that if any portion of this Ordinance is found invalid for any reason, such holding shall not be construed as affecting the validity of the remaining portions of this Ordinance.
Section 6. Repealer Clause. This section provides that any ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed only to the extent necessary to give the Ordinance full force and effect.
Section 7: Effective Date. This section provides that the Ordinance shall become effective immediately following publication.

Published by:
Kara Hartmann, Columbia Township Clerk

Buy It. Sell It. Find It. CLASSIFIED.

Covert Township Special Board Meeting held November 20, 2025, at 6:30pm Covert Township Hall 73943 E. Lake St., Covert, MI 49043

Call to order/Pledge of Allegiance 6:30pm
Roll call: Rose, Pritchard, Rendell, Taylor; absent: Cook
Public Comment: None
Motions approved:
*to appoint Taylor as meeting moderator
*the agenda as presented
*police department expenses related to an ongoing investigation
*to enter closed session
*to approve NCG litigation strategy and carry it out
*distribution of Master Plan to proper entities in January after approved changes are made

Public Comment: M. Bennett
Adjourned at 8:27pm

Next Regular Township Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at 6:00PM at the Covert Twp Hall, 73943 Lake St.

Respectfully submitted by Wednesday Pritchard, Covert Twp Clerk

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

IN RE: THE MATTER OF: TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS FOR **THE PROPOSED ADOPTION OF:** SUNAMIR RIDER-EL **DOB:** 09/06/2021 Minor Child. **CASE NO.:** FMCE-25-018325

NOTICE OF ACTION FOR TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS AND STEPPARENT ADOPTION

TO: MERCEDES GANT

YOU ARE NOTIFIED that a Petition for Termination of Parental Rights has been filed against you regarding the above-referenced male child, Sunamir Rider-El. DOB 9/6/21. You are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to Juliana Gaita, Esq. of Juliana Gaita, P.A. whose address is 2500 N. Military Trail Ste. 303, Boca Raton, FL 33431 on or before the below hearing date and file the original with the Clerk of this Court at, Broward County Courthouse, 201 SE 6th Street, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301, before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. **If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.**
You are required to appear before The Honorable Judge Yael Gamm on **December 8, 2025**, at 10:30 am or as soon after as the matter may be called at the Broward County Courthouse, via Zoom: https://17thflcourts.zoom.us/j/697041821 Meeting ID: 697 041 821 for a Final Termination of Parental Rights hearing.
FAILURE TO APPEAR AT THIS HEARING CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO THE TERMINATION OF THE PARENTAL RIGHTS OF YOUR RIGHTS TO THE CHILD. IF YOU FAIL TO APPEAR ON THE DATE AND TIME SPECIFIED YOU MAY LOSE ALL LEGAL RIGHTS TO THE CHILD WHOSE INITIALS APPEAR ABOVE
Mercedes Gant physical description is a black female, dob 12/23/99. Brown eyes, brown hair approximately 5'6 and approximately 150 pounds.
If you fail to file a written response and/or appear at the hearing, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

This notice shall be published once a week for four consecutive weeks in Broward County, Florida and Van Buren County, Michigan

WITNESS my hand and the seal of said court on October 28, 2025, Broward County, Florida.

Clerk Name: Brenda D. Foreman
As clerk, Circuit Court, Broward County, FL

Juliana Gaita, Esq.
Attorney for Petitioner
2500 N. Military Trail, Ste. 303 Boca Raton, FL 33431
phone (561)869-3703

Classifieds Make A Cash Connection!

Photos provided

Cookies and Cocoa with Captain Bob will be the third event in Holidays at the Heritage Center celebration on Dec. 20.

Maritime museum to host Holidays at the Heritage Center

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Michigan Maritime Museum recently announced the return of its seasonal celebration Holidays at the Heritage Center.

According to a news release, the celebration includes several events that will run through Jan. 4, 2026.

"Each year, the museum transforms into a sparkling winter wonderland filled with festive décor, family-friendly activities and holiday cheer for visitors of all ages," the release stated.

The first event, the Holiday Twilight Concert featuring the Kal-Haven Strings, will take place from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 17.

"Immerse yourself in an enchanting twilight concert with the Kal-Haven Strings duet," the release stated. "Megan Healy and Lydia Raymond will fill the evening with an uplifting blend of holiday favorites, creating a festive and family-friendly atmosphere perfect for celebrating the season together."

The Michigan Maritime Museum will host several event, including Selfies with Santa on Dec. 20, as part of their Holidays at the Heritage Center celebration.

The concert is free with a donation of $5 or a non-perishable food item

The second event, Selfies with Santa, will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Dec. 20.

"The holiday excitement continues as Santa returns to the Maritime Heritage Center," the release stated. "Come watch for Santa as he makes his entrance into the Deary-Mead Family Grand Atrium for photos, warm chats, and plenty of holiday cheer."

North Pole refreshments will be served at the Jerry Mason Learning Center. Selfies with Santa is a free event.

Cookies and Cocoa with Captain Bob will be the third event in the holiday celebration that will take place from noon to 1 p.m. on Dec. 20.

"Before or after your Selfie with Santa, join Captain Bob as he reads books in the Jerry Mason Learning Center from the newly updated museum Ship's Store," the release stated. "Sip hot cocoa, nibble cookies and soak in a warm, festive, family-friendly atmosphere full of holiday cheer."

The event is free and open to the public.

Part of the celebration includes free admission from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the first Sunday of every month from November through April 2026.

This special offer gives both residents and visitors the opportunity to explore the museum's exhibits and discover the maritime heritage of the Great Lakes region at no cost.

"This year has been one of growth and memorable milestones for the Museum," Executive Director Bailey Sisoy-Moore said in the release. "Holidays at the Heritage Center gives us the chance to celebrate community, spread seasonal cheer and thank everyone who makes our mission possible. We look forward to welcoming families, friends and visitors for another magical year."

Holidays at the Heritage Center is sponsored by Greg and Marian O'Niel.

Scholarships awarded to employees at Bronson South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — 12 Bronson South Haven Hospital employees were recently awarded a total of $15,000 in scholarships to advance their healthcare careers.

According to a news release, each employee received between $150 to 2,000, which will support a variety of educational and development opportunities.

"These dedicated team members are investing in their own growth, and that benefits everyone," South Haven Health System Advisory Board Member Dr. Richard Allen said in the release. "Each scholarship helps strengthen the future of healthcare in the South Haven community."

These scholarship awards mark the distribution of the final remaining assets of the former South Haven Community Hospital.

Some of the educational and developmental opportunities include:

- Nursing school tuition
- Business management courses for healthcare leadership
- Re-certifications for rehab support and medical assistants
- Radiology technician education
- Continued education for personal training
- Respiratory care tuition

"These scholarships were made possible thanks to the South Haven Health System Legacy Donor Advised Fund, established in 2021 through Bronson Health Foundation," the release stated.

The mission of the scholarship is to provide financial assistance to Bronson South Haven Hospital employees – particularly lower income employees – who are seeking to advance their career at Bronson.

"We are so grateful to these community leaders with long-time ties to the area who have chosen to use these legacy funds to support today's employees," Chief Operating Officer and Vice President for medical affairs for Bronson South Haven and Bronson LakeView Hospitals Dr. Matthew Dommer said in the release.

Photo provided

Recipients of the scholarship awards were recently joined by leaders from Bronson South Haven Hospital, Bronson Health Foundation and the South Haven Health System Advisory Board.

Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Girlfriend!

She's a nine-year-old senior sweetheart from Al-Van Humane Society, and while she may start out a little shy, she warms up into the world's most dependable cuddle buddy. Girlfriend loves sunbathing, giving those big warm bear-hugs she's famous for, and chatting about her day like any respectable queen of the household. She's potty trained, low-drama, and all heart. If you're looking for a loyal, gentle companion who just wants a cozy place to nap and someone to adore, come meet Girlfriend. She might just be the best Girlfriend you've ever had.

Girlfriend is spayed, vaccinated, microchipped and heartworm negative. To submit an adoption survey visit us online at al-van.org/adopt.

Black Friday Adoption Deal!
This Black Friday and Saturday, Al-Van Humane Society is celebrating with a special adoption event. All of our black and white pets are 50 percent off, and they're ready to bring a little extra joy into your home for the holidays. If you've been thinking about adopting, this is the perfect time to meet your new best friend and give a pet in need a fresh start. Stop by the Adoption Center and find the perfect match waiting just for you!

Fur Ball 2026: Breakfast at Tiffany's
Save the Date! Join us for a glamorous evening of elegance at Al-Van Humane Society's Fur Ball 2026: Breakfast at Tiffany's, on February 21, 2026! This spectacular evening will include dinner, cash bar, live and silent auctions, lively dueling pianos, and plenty of dancing.
Guests are encouraged to dress to impress in their finest evening wear or add a Breakfast at Tiffany's flair to their look. Whether you're bidding, dancing, or sipping something sparkling, every moment supports local animals in need. Tickets go on sale on our website on December 5, 2025

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Dry Purina dog food, wet dog food and dish soap.

Paw Paw launches Christmas in the Village celebration

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — Paw Paw will debut its new Christmas in the Village celebration this holiday season.

According to a news release, the two-day celebration will take place on Dec. 12 and 13.

"Christmas in the Village is about bringing our community together to celebrate the magic of the season," Janice Chittle from Destination Paw Paw said in the release. "We're so proud of how many local businesses, volunteers and organizations came together to make this new holiday tradition possible."

The event kicks off at 6:00 p.m. on Dec. 12 with the Lighted Holiday Parade through downtown, led by this year's Grand Marshals Roman and Ava Plaszczak.

"Community members, organizations and businesses are invited to take part and there's still time to sign up for the parade," the release stated.

The Tree Lighting Ceremony at the Courthouse follows at 6:45 p.m., where Paul DeYoung will be honored with the Community Ambassador Award.

Photos with Santa will follow the tree lighting.

Festivities continue on at 9 a.m. on Dec. 13 with the Rotary 5K Santa Run, followed by Kringle Town on Paw Paw Street from 10 a.m to 4 p.m.

Kringle Town will feature old-world charm and handcrafted gifts in wooden market houses donated by Meyer Wood Products.

The day also includes the Merry Village Mingle throughout downtown shops.

Families can also enjoy pictures with Santa at the Carnegie from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday where children can visit Santa, share their wish lists and enjoy cookies and cocoa.

This is a no-cost family event open to all.

Enjoy wassailing by the Paw Paw Village Players and live ice sculpting sponsored by Destination Paw Paw along with support from the Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Van Buren County Commissioners, the Village of Paw Paw and many volunteers.

"Christmas in the Village is truly a reflection of what makes Paw Paw so special," Downtown Development Authority Coordinator Mary Springer said in the release. "This event came together through the hard work of so many – our local businesses, volunteers and community partners, all joining forces to bring something joyful and new to downtown. It's a wonderful example of what can happen when we work together."

For more information, go to the Christmas in the Village Facebook page.

Michigan State University extension hosts conflict workshop

By TRIBUNE STAFF

HARTFORD — This winter season, the Michigan State University Extension Van Buren County office will be hosting an in-person workshop to help people get through conflicts a little better.

According to a news release, the two-hour interactive workshop will take place from 10 a.m. to noon on Dec. 6 at 57418 CR 681, Suite A, Hartford, MI.

"From challenging coworkers to frustrating family members, the holidays can be filled with conflicts," the release stated. "That is why it is especially important to develop and maintain positive relationships by gaining skills to handle conflict competently."

The interactive "Communicating through Conflict" workshop will provide participants with tools and techniques to handle heated situations and interpersonal conflict more effectively and have a happier holiday season.

"Past participants have found Communicating through Conflict valuable to their growth and development and dilled with tips they found helpful," the release stated.

Those who come will gain a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict and practice new skills around taking pauses, asking questions, and listening deeply.

All participants will receive a copy of the university Extension's Communicating through Conflict Workbook that is filled with practical tips and activities to work on challenging conflicts.

Registration is now open and available online at events.anr.msu.edu/CTCvanburen25.

The cost to register is $20 per person and space is limited.

To contact the Van Buren County MSU Extension office, go to www.canr.msu.edu/van_buren or call (269) 657-8213.

For more information on this program go to www.canr.msu.edu/events.

this giving tuesday
UNITED WAY Southwest Michigan
give
advocate
volunteer

for more info: uwsm.org/donate

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: New Exhibit – "The Adventures of Liberty Hyde Bailey – Chicago: 1872." Available during museum hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring – 1 pm Tuesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring – 1 pm Wednesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

South Haven Memorial Library: Autumn Painting Contest from Oct. 20 to Nov. 10. Participants can pick up a mini canvas from the library and paint, sketch or color something for fall or Thanksgiving related, featuring either books or the library. Painting need to be dropped of by Nov. 10. The public can vote on the painting from Nov. 17 to 24.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

Lake Michigan College South Haven Campus: Technology Help Workshops from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Thursday through Dec. 11.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

John Merlein, Todd Heinrich and Amy Nichols along with other South Haven Rotarians gathered to observe the internationally recognized Peace Pole Day in Stanley Johnston Park.

December

1-7 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: Shop Small Challenge; post a photo of your small business shopping haul on Facebook, tag the chamber and the small business you shopped at.

1 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

2 – Rotary Club: David Flack will present on the new park district and dog park.

3 – South Haven Memorial Library: Music and Movement at 11 a.m.

4 – First United Methodist Church: Free meal. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the meal is served at 6 p.m.

5 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-doh play date at 11 a.m.

5 – First Congregational UCC: Diane and Lisa Holiday Concert at 6 p.m. Admission is $20 at the door, children 12 and under are free.

6 – Michigan State University Extension Van Buren County office: Two hour interactive communicating through conflict workshop from 10 a.m. to noon. $20 per person to register.

7 – Paw Paw Community Chorus: 25th Annual Christmas Concert at 4 p.m. at Paw Paw United Methodist Church.

8 – South Haven Garden Club: Club Christmas party at First Congregational Church.

8 – South Haven Area Water Sewer Authority: Water and sewer rates and fees informational meeting from 5 to 7 p.m. at South Haven High School integrated learning center, 600 Elkenburg St.

10 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

11 – First United Methodist Church: Free meal. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the meal is served at 6 p.m.

12 – South Haven Memorial Library: South Haven Writers Christmas Story read-around from 1 to 4 p.m. Open to the public.

12-13 – Christmas in the Village: Paw Paw holiday events including the Lighted Holiday Parade, tree lighting ceremony, Rotary 5K Santa Run and pictures with Sanat.

13 – Rotary Club: Rotary and Salvation Army Bell Ringing at Flying Saucer and Walmart.

15 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

17 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Holiday Twilight Concert featuring the Kal-Haven Strings from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free concert with a $5 donation or a non-perishable food item.

18 – First United Methodist Church: Free meal. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the meal is served at 6 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Free STEM activities event from 11 a.m. to noon.

20 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Selfies with Santa from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

20 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Cookies and Cocoa with Captain Bob from noon to 1 p.m.

21 – South Haven Performance Series: Choral ensemble Vox GR to perform at 4 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

22 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

29 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

31 – New Years Eve Celebration: Downtown South Haven.

Housing market sees sales rebound in SWMI

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Home sales have steadily increased this fall season in Southwest Michigan.

According to a report from the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors, 289 homes were sold in September – a slight drop from the 304 housing units sold the month before. However, the number of homes sold increased in October.

"Selling prices continued to climb year-over-year in October for the last six years," said Luke Jeffries, association executive, Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors. "The number of houses sold in October increased 8 percent from October 2024. Year-to-date, sales have increased 4 percent."

The inventory of houses for sale remained within five houses of the previous year's level from October of 2024 to October of this year.

Jeffries said this slight change reduced the supply level to 5.7 months from the 5.9 months at the end of September. For comparison, in October of 2010, there were 3,385 houses for sale for 16.6-month supply of houses for homebuyers.

The average selling price in October of 2025 rose by 14 percent to $452,669 from $398,212 in October of 2024. Year-to-date, in 2025, the average selling price grew 14 percent to $428,367 from $374,904.

The median selling price in October of 2025, $297,500, increased by 7 percent from $279,000 in October of 2024. Year-to-date, the median selling price increased by 8 percent.

The Freddie Mac mortgage rate in October fell to 6.17, up from 6.30 in September for a 30-year conventional mortgage. A year ago, the rate was 6.72.

The total dollar volume in October of 2025 increased 22 percent compared to October of 2024. The year-to-date total dollar volume in 2025 grew by 19 percent.

The number of bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a percentage of all transactions rose to 2 percent from 1 percent in September. There were six houses included.

Across the country

Existing-home sales increased by 1.2 percent in October, according to the National Association of Realtors Existing-Home Sales Report.

Month-over-month sales increased in the Midwest and South, showed no change in the Northeast, and fell in the West. Year-over-year sales rose in the Northeast, Midwest, and South, and decreased in the West.

"Home sales increased in October even with the government shutdown due to homebuyers taking advantage of lower mortgage rates," said NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun. "First-time homebuyers are facing headwinds in the Northeast due to a lack of supply and in the West because of high home prices. First-time buyers fared better in the Midwest because of the plentiful supply of affordable houses and in the South because there is sufficient inventory."

Total existing-home sales increased 1.2 percent in total sales month-over-month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.1 million in October. To date, the year-over-year sales have increased 1.7 percent.

"Rents are decelerating, which will reduce inflation and encourage the Federal Reserve to continue cutting rates and pulling back their quantitative tightening," Yun said. "This will help bring more homebuyers into the market since the Fed rate has an indirect impact on mortgage rates."

The median existing-home price for all housing types in October was $415,200, up 2.1 percent from one year ago – the 28th consecutive month of year-over-year price increases.

In the Midwest, existing-home sales increased 5.3 percent month-over-month to an annual rate of 990,000, up 2.1 percent year-over-year.

The total housing inventory registered at the end of October was 1.52 million units, down 0.7 percent from September and up 10.9 percent from October of 2024. Unsold inventory sits at a 4.4-month supply, down from 4.5 months in September and up from 4.1 months in October of 2024.

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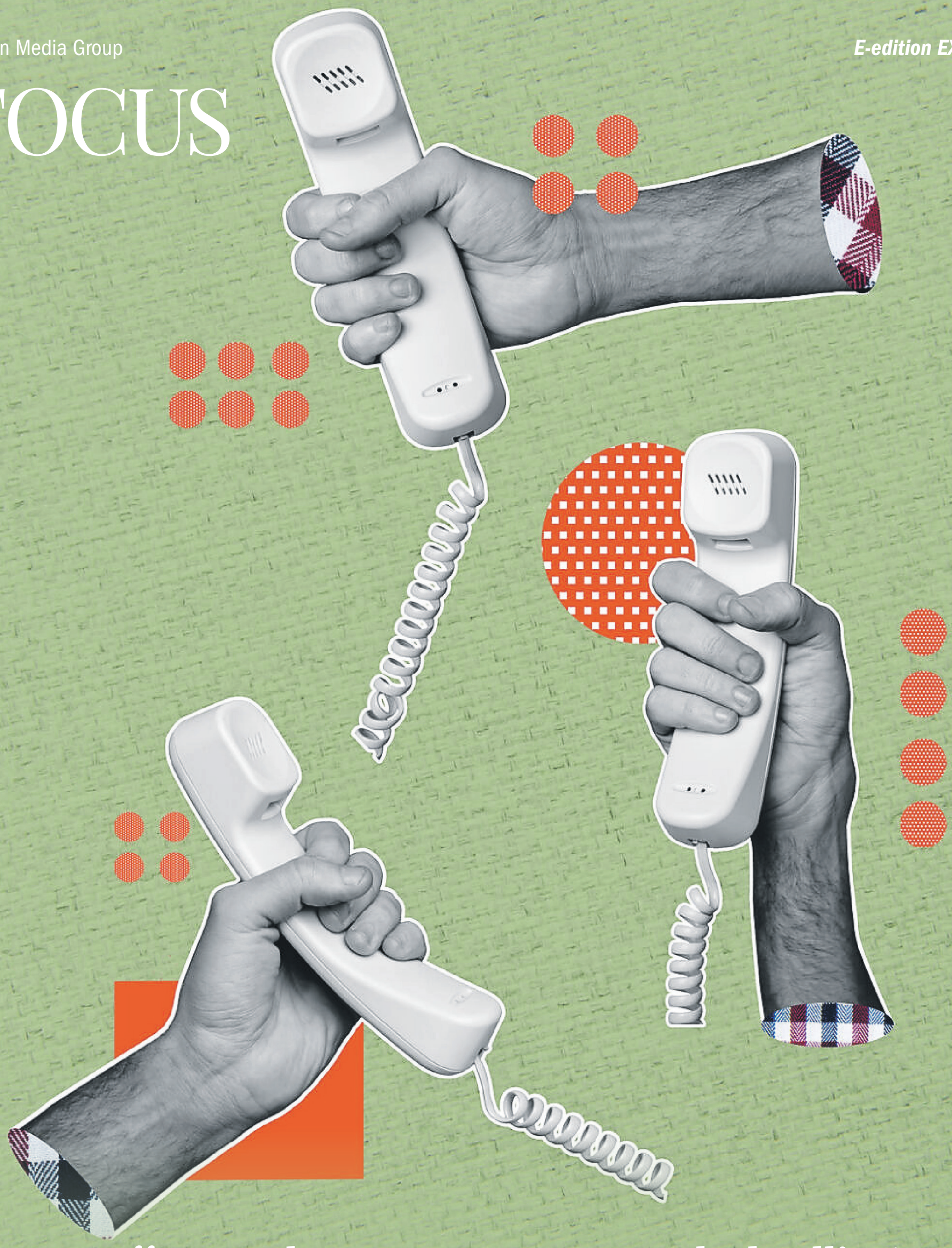
Bloomingdale Chapel
203 East Spring
P.O. Box 171
Bloomingdale, MI 49026
(269) 521-3121
Floyd Decker, Manager
Gobles Chapel
208 West Main
P.O. Box 6
Gobles, MI 49055
(269) 628-2852
D. Lee Miller, Manager

If interested in including your business here contact freid@thehp.com



To stave off smartphones, parents answer the landline's call

'I can't recommend it highly enough'

By RACHEL HUTTON
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS — Teenagers are generally obsessed with their smartphones. So much so that Kristin Hatling's family recently encountered a gaggle of them who had brought their screens into a resort's hot tub.

"My daughter, who's 11, was like, 'Mom, all they're doing is looking at their phones and, like, making kissy faces into them. They're not even talking to each other."

While a majority of American 11-and-12-year-olds have their own smartphones, the Minneapolis mother of three is among a growing cohort of parents looking back to their own childhoods for a lower-tech alternative. They're ringing up the landline most households have now abandoned, whose old-school handsets are so rare parents have to coach kids how to use them. These modern "landlines," which are actually Wi-Fi-enabled home phones, have proved popular. One kid-friendly version, the Tin Can, is on a several-month backorder.

Millennial and Gen X parents who spent their teenage years stretching spiral phone cords into their bedrooms and talking until their receiver-ears burned, are reviving the home phone to improve their kids' communication skills without the risks a pocketful of internet can bring.

Hatling and other Minnesota parents say the landline has introduced their kids to the lost art of conversation, given them more independence and helped them take responsibility for their relationships.

But first, Gen Alpha had to learn Landline 101: How to put your mouth near the receiver.

Initially, Hatling's kids held their new cordless handset out in front of them, as they did using FaceTime. "I was like: 'That doesn't work. You have to put it up to your ear,'" she recalled. "And then when someone picked up, they didn't say anything. And I was like, 'OK, what you want to say is, Hi, this is Harper. Is so-and-so there?'"

Early adopters hope to boost their landlines' impact by encouraging their peers to stave off the smartphone and answer the home-phone's call.

"We're trying to get a cohort of younger families that will buy into this, so by the time they're in middle school and high school, it's kind of the flavor, and there isn't as much pressure to be throwing your kids into technology," Hatling said.

Smartphones' downside

The landline appealed to Hatling because she was concerned by research in "The Anxious Generation" connecting smartphones' arrival to rising rates of anxiety and depression among teens. Her own observations worried her, too.

As a high school teacher, Hatling says she's seen smartphones negatively impact students' well-being, classroom performance and relationships. Even in schools with phone bans, she saw kids sneaking peeks at the addictive devices.

"It's like having a handful of candy in your pocket," she said. "The tech gurus don't allow their children to use it – that's saying something."

Hatling acknowledges there are good reasons school-age kids already have smartphones. They can be useful tools. But the more kids are surrounded by peers with smartphones, the more pressure there is to want one – and for parents to feel bad about their kid being left out.

Anthony Souffle / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

Wren Hatling, 11, talks with her grandmother on her family's home phone last Tuesday in south Minneapolis.

To Hatling, society bought into the technology a little too quickly. "We didn't really think through how that was going to play out in everyday life for younger kids."

With the home phone, Hatling says her daughters' ability to cultivate relationships without a parental intermediary has given them more independence and agency, along with a greater sense of competence. (To communicate away from home, some landline adopters also give their kids GPS-enabled watches or an internet-free "dumb" phone.)

And there have been benefits for Hatling, including not having to share her smartphone with her kids and lightening the mental load of plan-making logistics.

Texting vs. calling

These days, Hatling no longer has to text her friend Elizabeth Temples to connect their daughters; the two girls call one another directly. Temples, who grew up memorizing friends' phone numbers and being annoyed by other family members tying up the line, says it was fun to overhear the girls compare their first days of sixth grade, now that they attend different middle schools. "Because there are parts of their day that your kid might not share, you get a little glimpse into their world," Temples said.

Temples' says her 11-year-old daughter recently called her out-of-state grandparents to initiate a birthday visit. But she's been reluctant to use the landline to call her peers who have their own cellphones, because the norm among cellphone users is to text. "She's like, 'If I give them this number, it could be really embarrassing, like, you might answer it!'" (Temples clarifies that she doesn't answer the landline. "People are not calling for me.")

'Real' conversations

Even kids too young to punch 10-digits are loving their speed dial-enabled home phone. Zindzi McCormick of St. Paul, whose greatest teenage aspiration was to have a second line and a phone in her room, has been teaching her daughters, ages 3 and 5, the conversation norms and scripts of her childhood. ("She's not available right now. Can I take a message?")

Her daughters mostly use the phone to call their grandparents to report their most banal activities. "They are very factual, like, 'I just woke up. I'm still wearing my pajamas. Dad is making breakfast.' It's so sweet to hear what is on their minds."

The girls are more focused when they're on the landline versus video calls, McCormick says, where they're distracted by looking at themselves or fiddling with those emoji-face effects.

McCormick's 5-year-old recently had her first landline-to-landline call with a friend, to the amusement of both their mothers. "The friend's mom and I were texting each other on the side, 'Do you have any idea what they're talking about?' It was, like, total nonsense."

McCormick noted how, within one generation, a formerly humdrum everyday activity has become a source of parental delight. She especially enjoys how overhearing calls gives her a window into the significance her children place on things an adult might not bother to mention, such as the mermaid theme of a friend's birthday party.

"Total perk," McCormick said of her ear-opening habit. "I can't recommend it highly enough."

Deagreez / Getty Images

FOCUS

Photos by Juliana Yamada / Los Angeles Times / TNS

Animal care specialist in training Serena Amaro instructs red-tailed black cockatoo "Joy" to spread her wings during a training exercise at Moorpark College Teaching Zoo on Oct. 20 in Moorpark, California. Moorpark College is just one of two teaching zoos at community colleges worldwide.

Tigers, a serval and a tortoise

Teaching zoo trains students for animal careers

By DANIEL MILLER
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — The serval did not want to go into her crate.

The spotted cat's name was Naomi, she had just been weighed, and now it was time to do as she was told.

"C'mon – in your crate," urged Thomas Barber, a student at Moorpark College.

Naomi, held on a leash by student Trinity Astilla, was the picture of lithe, feline elegance as she slunk around a dusty enclosure, briefly hopping atop her crate – but not into it.

"Rethink about building behavior momentum," animal training instructor Amanda Stansbury counseled Barber.

After about 10 minutes – and a repositioning of the crate – Naomi entered.

"Good job – a good demonstration of working through it," Stansbury said.

This is what class looks like in Moorpark College's Animal Care and Training Program, where students get real-world experience at the campus' Teaching Zoo.

Moorpark College students Thomas Barber, left, and Trinity Astilla, right, lead a serval named Naomi back to her crate at the school's Teaching Zoo.

Home to 120 animals representing 110 species, the zoo is one of two such collegiate facilities in the country – the other is Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo in Gainesville, Florida – and draws students from California and beyond who are looking for a career working with animals.

The program traces its roots to 1971, when the community college began offering a class in exotic animal studies, expanding to a full-fledged major three years later. Students learn on the job, preparing food for the animals, feeding them, weighing them and even putting on demonstrations for children visiting on school field trips.

"We do a lot of hands-on training, and to me, it's always magic," said Gary Mui, who graduated from the program in 1995 and now oversees it.

The program admits 60 students annually, and about 45 graduate each year.

"That attrition is a marker for how difficult and time-consuming the program is," said Mara Rodriguez, the zoo's development coordinator.

Still, it's popular: 150 or so Moorpark College students apply each year, gaining entry via a lottery.

The two-year program prepares graduates for careers in a variety of fields, from zookeeping to Hollywood animal training, wildlife conservation and even pest abatement.

Trinity Astilla, a Moorpark College student, watches as a llama makes an alarm call at the Teaching Zoo.

Wait, pest abatement?

"At all the landfills now, they use natural ways to deter pests like seagulls and rats ... so they fly hawks," said Rodriguez, who graduated from the program in 1992 and started working at the zoo that year.

The zoo is open to the public on the weekends – admission is $12 for adults and $10 for children – and despite spanning just five acres, it features animals like a 102-year-old Galapagos tortoise and two Bengal tigers housed in a $3.5-million enclosure.

Many of the weekend staffers are students in the program. They even put on animal shows at the zoo's outdoor theater.

"I'm on stage with my target stick, my equipment, and having a porcupine do circles, follow me, roll a ball," said Jadyn Carnicella, 20, a Simi Valley resident. "It's one of my favorite parts, because it's showing off how incredible our animals are. It really is a way to promote conservation."

What the school's like

Moorpark College is tucked into the folds of the chaparral-dusted Simi Hills, about 45 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Walking among the zoo's exotic animals, it feels even farther – especially at the edge of the soaring, 8,000-square-foot tiger enclosure.

During a recent visit, Carnicella and another student, Trinity Sato, fed the two big cats, who had lumbered up to the fence after catching a whiff of their meal: a mixture of beef and horse meat called "Nebraska." (Carnicella advised against eating it: a student who did "got severe food poisoning.")

She and Sato smushed big clumps of the meat through the chain-link barrier, careful to keep their hands flat, lest they lose a digit.

"Being here is a privilege and I always want to just keep my skills sharp, especially around the tigers, since they are such huge and dangerous predators," said Sato, 26, who is from Torrance. "It's an honor to be able to work with them and be entrusted with their care."

One of those big cats, Neil, is something of a celebrity: He was confiscated from a Studio City man years ago after appearing in a widely seen YouTube clip with Logan Paul, the influencer and reality TV star.

Unlike institutions such as the Los Angeles Zoo, Moorpark College's facility has not faced major criticism on ethical grounds, perhaps because of its academic focus. It hosts many animals that previously were injured, ostracized from their social groups or illegally kept as pets – such as Neil.

"When we're acquiring animals, it's always about the fit – not just the fit for our program but the fit for the individual animal," Mui said. "We want to make sure that they have the best life possible."

Students must do a training stint in each of four main categories – carnivore, herbivore, bird and primate – so they may wind up working with animals they find unpleasant. For Mui, it was rats. Same for Rodriguez.

What does a typical day look like? Roll call at 6:30 a.m., then clean the animals' enclosures and carry out other tasks. Classes begin at 9 a.m. and last until noon, then continue after lunch until 4 p.m., when students begin closing the zoo for the day.

On weekends they don't have class – but they do have to operate the zoo, along with a few professionals who "oversee and guide everything," Mui said.

What graduates do

After two years, students who entered the program having already fulfilled all of their general education prerequisites graduate with an associate's of science degree in animal care and training. The others get a certificate of completion. And where do they go from there?

Grace Nasser, who grew up in Northridge and graduated in 2023, works at Dolphin Quest Hawaii, where customers swim with and learn about the aquatic mammals. She hadn't worked with dolphins previously but got the chance during a weeklong internship at Dolphin Quest that the college facilitated during her second year.

It was, she said, "never something I'd ever envisioned."

Rodriguez said the program has relationships with more than 100 zoos and other facilities that it can tap for internships.

Second-year students Sato and Carnicella aren't sure what they'll do upon graduation, but both are interested in careers involving big cats.

"I really do want to work with large carnivores, tigers, lions ... you know, the things that can kill me," Carnicella said with a laugh.

Marina113 / Getty Images

Americans are unprepared for the expensive and complex process of aging – a geriatrician explains how they can start planning

By KAHLI ZIETLOW
University of Michigan (The Conversation)

Hollywood legend Gene Hackman and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, were found dead in their home in February 2025. Hackman had been living with Alzheimer's and depended on Arakawa as his full-time caregiver.

Disturbingly, postmortem data suggests that Arakawa died of complications from pulmonary Hantavirus several days before her husband passed. The discordant times of death point to a grim scenario: Hackman was left alone and helpless, trapped in his home after his wife's death.

The couple's story, while shocking, is not unique. It serves as a warning for our rapidly aging society. The U.S. population is aging, but most Americans are not adequately planning to meet the needs of older adulthood.

As a geriatric physician and medical educator, I care for older adults in both inpatient and outpatient settings. My research and clinical work focus on dementia and surrogate decision-making.

In my experience, regardless of race, education or socioeconomic status, there are some universal challenges that all people face with aging and there are steps everyone can take to prepare.

Aging is inevitable but unpredictable

Aging is an unpredictable, highly individualized process that varies depending on a person's genetics, medical history, cognitive status and socioeconomic factors.

The majority of older Americans report a strong sense of purpose and self-worth. Many maintain a positive view of their overall health well into their 70s and 80s.

But at some point, the body starts to slow down. Older adults experience gradual sensory impairment, loss of muscle mass and changes in their memory. Chronic diseases are more likely with advancing age.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 46 percent of adults over age 75 live with at least one physical disability, and this proportion grows with age. Even those without major health issues may find that routine tasks like yard work, housekeeping and home repairs become insurmountable as they enter their 80s and 90s.

Some may find that subtle changes in memory make it difficult to manage household finances or keep track of their medications. Others may find that vision loss and slowed reaction time make it harder to safely drive. Still others may struggle with basic activities needed to live independently, such as bathing or using a toilet. All of these changes threaten older adults' ability to remain independent.

The costs of aging

Nearly 70 percent of older Americans will require long-term care in their lifetime, whether through paid, in-home help or residence in an assisted living facility or nursing home.

But long-term care is expensive. In 2021, the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program reported that the average hourly rate for in-home care was US$27. An assisted living apartment averaged $4,800 per month, and a nursing home bed cost nearly double that, at a rate of $276 per day.

Many Americans may be shocked to discover that these costs are not covered by Medicare or other traditional medical insurance. Long-term care insurance covers the cost of long-term care, such as in-home care or nursing home placement. However, what is covered varies from plan to plan. Currently, only a small minority of Americans have long-term care insurance due to high premiums and complex activation rules.

I am not aware of any high-quality, peer-reviewed studies that have demonstrated the cost effectiveness of long-term care insurance. Yet, for many Americans, paying for care out of pocket is simply not an option.

Medicaid can provide financial support for long-term care but only for older adults with very low income and minimal assets – criteria most Americans don't meet until they have nearly exhausted their savings.

Those receiving Medicaid to cover the costs of long-term care have essentially no funds for anything other than medical care, room and board. And proposed federal financial cuts may further erode the limited support services available. In Michigan, for example, Medicaid-covered nursing home residents keep only $60 per month for personal needs. If individuals receive monthly income greater than $60 – for instance, from Social Security or a pension – the extra money would go toward the cost of nursing home care.

Those who don't qualify for Medicaid or cannot afford private care often rely on family and friends for unpaid assistance, but not everyone has such support systems.

Planning for the care you want

Beyond financial planning, older adults can make an advance directive. This is a set of legal documents that outlines preferences for medical care and asset management if a person becomes incapacitated. However, only about 25 percent of Americans over 50 have completed such documentation.

Without medical and financial powers of attorney in place, state laws determine who makes critical decisions, which may or may not align with a person's wishes. For instance, an estranged child may have more legal authority over an incapacitated parent than their long-term but unmarried partner. Seniors without clear advocates risk being placed under court-appointed guardianship – a restrictive and often irreversible process.

In addition to completing advance directives, it is important that older adults talk about their wishes with their loved ones. Conversations about disability, serious illness and loss of independence can be difficult, but these discussions allow your loved ones to advocate for you in the event of a health crisis.

Who's going to care for you?

Finding a caregiver is an important step in making arrangements for aging. If you are planning to rely on family or friends for some care, it helps to discuss this with them ahead of time and to have contingency plans in place. As the Hackman case demonstrates, if a caregiver is suddenly incapacitated, the older adult may be left in immediate danger.

Caregivers experience higher rates of stress, depression and physical illness compared with their peers. This is often exacerbated by financial strain and a lack of support. It helps if the people you will be relying on have expectations in place about their role.

For instance, some people may prefer placement in a facility rather than relying on a loved one if they can no longer use the bathroom independently. Others may wish to remain in their homes as long as this is a feasible option.

Connecting with available resources

There are local and federal initiatives designed to help aging adults find and get the help they need. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recently launched the GUIDE Model to improve care and quality of life for both those suffering from dementia and their caregivers.

This program connects caregivers with local resources and provides a 24-hour support line for crises. While GUIDE, which stands for Guiding an Improved Dementia Experience, is currently in the pilot stage, it is slowly expanding, and I am hopeful that it will eventually expand to provide enhanced coverage for those suffering from dementia nationwide.

The Program for All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly helps dual-eligible Medicare and Medicaid recipients remain at home as they age. This program provides comprehensive services including medical care, a day center and home health services.

Area agencies on aging are regionally located and can connect older adults with local resources, based on availability and income, such as meals, transportation and home modifications that help maintain independence.

Unfortunately, all of these programs and others that support older adults are threatened by recent federal budget cuts. The tax breaks and spending cuts bill, which was signed into law in July 2025, will result in progressive reductions to Medicaid funding over the next 10 years. These cuts will decrease the number of individuals eligible for Medicaid and negatively affect how nursing homes are reimbursed.

The government funding bill passed on Nov. 13 extends current Medicare funding through Jan. 30, 2026, at which point Medicare funding may be reduced.

Even as the future of these programs remains uncertain, it's important for older adults and their caregivers to be intentional in making plans and to familiarize themselves with the resources available to them.

Kahli Zietlow is a physician and clinical associate professor of geriatrics and internal medicine at the University of Michigan.

HEALTH

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Don't stress *about overeating during the holidays*

A dietitian explains how a day of indulgence won't harm your overall health

By BRYN BEEDER
Miami University (The Conversation)

For many, holidays are synonymous with quality time and long-standing traditions. Typically laden with delicious foods, it's not uncommon to eat more during the holidays than you usually would.

You likely know that feeling of being too stuffed – the point when you're pleasantly satisfied one moment and uncomfortably full the next. On top of that physical discomfort can come extra helpings of guilt for eating more than you wanted or expected.

The physical and psychological pressure of holiday meals can be challenging. As a registered dietitian, I want to assure you that your body knows what to do with that extra food and drink, and that your overall health and well-being are defined by much more than a few days of indulgence. In fact, the experience of eating and sharing food may play a valuable role in creating lasting, positive memories of the holiday season.

Still, if you've ever wondered what's happening inside your body after a big meal, you're not alone. Understanding a bit about how digestion works can make the post-meal feelings a little less mysterious and a lot less stressful.

Slowing down digestion

Food is made up of three main macronutrients: carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Your gastrointestinal tract uses both mechanical and chemical processes to break down these nutrients into their simplest form so they can be absorbed and used for energy, repair and carrying out biological functions.

THE CONVERSATION

When you eat a large holiday meal, you will likely consume more of all the macronutrients than you usually would, in a shorter period of time. The larger quantity of food will require a bit more time to digest, meaning it will move more slowly along your GI tract.

Protein and fats also naturally take longer to break down. While more carbohydrate-rich foods, such as a granola bar or a glass of orange juice, give you a quick burst of energy, adding more protein- and fat-rich foods, such as eggs or chicken, to your meal provides energy that lasts longer.

In this case, the slower digestive process can actually be beneficial for steady energy and appetite control.

Physical discomfort

Rest assured, your digestive system will carry on no matter how big the meal. Rather, the question is how long digestion will take and whether that may cause some temporary discomfort along the way.

When you eat, your stomach stretches to accommodate the food you consumed. As the stomach works to pass food contents into the small intestine, there is an increased chance of heartburn – a backflow of acidic stomach contents that can cause a burning sensation in your chest or sour taste in your mouth. Extra food can also lead to stomach pain, nausea, gas and bloating, as well as a general sluggish feeling.

Even before the first bite, your body begins preparing for digestion. The first sight and smell of food increases your body's production of saliva and stomach acid in anticipation of the work ahead.

When the workload is greater than usual, your body temporarily expends more energy to fuel the digestive process, both in breaking down macronutrients and in absorbing that fuel for use later. As a result, it is typical to feel more tired after a large meal.

To reduce the physical discomfort of digestion, try staying upright after a meal. While lying down may be tempting, it can increase stomach pain and the risk of heartburn. Give your body time and let gravity work in your favor by staying upright for at least two to three hours after eating. A 10- to 15-minute walk can also be beneficial to the digestive process, increasing stomach contractions and overall blood flow to the GI tract. This can in turn move food out of the stomach and into the small intestine more efficiently.

Moving past food guilt

One day of indulgence alone will not cause permanent weight gain or lasting changes to your physical health. But repeated patterns of food guilt can, over time, lead to an unhealthy relationship to food.

Beyond digestion, the way you think and talk about food can be just as important as how you feel after eating. Food does not have moral value, and yet it is easy to become caught in the habit of labeling foods as "good" or "bad." This mindset often shows up during the holidays. Think about how often you hear yourself or others say, "I was good all morning so I can eat more tonight" or "I'm going to be bad and have the pie, too." How you speak about food directly shapes how you feel about eating it and about yourself.

Food can also bring positive emotions and good memories. When your body recognizes a strong emotion tied to a food smell, the emotional center of your brain – the amygdala – alerts the part of your brain that forms and stores long-term memories, your hippocampus. This explains why the smell of grandma's pie can transport you to a vivid memory.

This holiday season, focus less on the calorie count and more on the company, the laughter, and the scents and flavors that make your traditions special. Eat the foods that bring you comfort and connection; you're nourishing more than just your body.

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Scientists create tool to predict Alzheimer's risk years before symptoms begin

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

ROCHESTER, Minn. — Mayo Clinic researchers have developed a new tool that can estimate a person's risk of developing memory and thinking problems associated with Alzheimer's disease years before symptoms appear. The research, published in The Lancet Neurology, builds on decades of data from the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging – one of the world's most comprehensive population-based studies of brain health.

The study found that women have a higher lifetime risk than men of developing dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI), a transitional stage between healthy aging and dementia that often affects quality of life but still allows people to live independently. Men and women with the common genetic variant, APOE ε4, also have higher lifetime risk.

Alzheimer's disease is marked by two key proteins in the brain: amyloid, which forms plaques, and tau, which forms tangles. Drugs recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration remove amyloid from the brain and can slow the rate of disease progression for people with MCI or mild dementia.

"What's exciting now is that we're looking even earlier – before symptoms begin – to see if we can predict who might be at greatest risk of developing cognitive problems in the future," says Clifford Jack, Jr., M.D., radiologist and lead author of the study.

Dreamstime / TNS

The new prediction model combined several factors, including age, sex, genetic risk as associated with APOE genotype and brain amyloid levels detected on PET scans. Using the data, researchers can calculate an individual's likelihood of developing MCI or dementia within 10 years or over the predicted lifetime. Of all the predictors evaluated, the brain amyloid levels detected on PET scans was the predictor with the largest effect for lifetime risk of both MCI and dementia.

"This kind of risk estimate could eventually help people and their doctors decide when to begin therapy or make lifestyle changes that may delay the onset of symptoms. It's similar to how cholesterol levels help predict heart attack risk," says Ronald Petersen, M.D., Ph.D., neurologist and director of the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging, who is a co-author of the study.

The research stands apart because it draws from the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging, a long-running effort in Olmsted County, Minnesota, that tracks thousands of residents over time. The analysis for this study included data from 5,858 participants. Unlike most studies, Mayo researchers are able to continue following participants even after they stop actively taking part, using medical record data – ensuring nearly complete information about who develops cognitive decline or dementia.

"This gives us a uniquely accurate picture of how Alzheimer's unfolds in the community," says Terry Therneau, Ph.D., who led the statistical analysis and is the senior author of the study. "We found that the incident rate of dementia was two times greater among the people who dropped out of the study than those who continued to participate."

The study elevates the significance of MCI, which is the stage targeted by current Alzheimer's drugs that slow but do not stop progression.

While the new tool is currently a research instrument, it represents a major step toward more personalized care. Future versions may incorporate blood-based biomarkers, which could make testing more accessible.

The work was supported by the National Institute on Aging, the GHR Foundation, Gates Ventures and the Alexander Family Foundation.

The research is part of a larger effort at Mayo Clinic called the Precure initiative focused on developing tools that empower clinicians to predict and intercept biological processes before they evolve into disease or progress into complex, hard-to-treat conditions.

"Ultimately, our goal is to give people more time – time to plan, to act and to live well before memory problems take hold," says Dr. Petersen.

THE CONVERSATION

Recent studies prove the ancient practice of

NASAL IRRIGATION

is effective at fighting the common cold

By MARY J. SCOURBOUTAKOS
Old Dominion University
(The Conversation)

It starts with a slight scratchiness at the back of your throat.

Then, a sneeze.

Then coughing, sniffling and full-on congestion, with or without fever, for a few insufferable days.

Viral upper respiratory tract infections – also known as the common cold – afflict everyone, typically three times per year, lasting, on average, nine days.

Colds don't respond to antibiotics, and most over-the-counter medications deliver modest results at best.

In recent years, research has emerged demonstrating the effectiveness of the ancient practice of nasal saline irrigation in fighting the common cold in both adults and children.

Not only does nasal saline irrigation decrease the duration of illness, it also reduces viral transmission to other people, minimizes the need for antibiotics and could even lower a patient's risk of hospitalization. Better yet, it costs pennies and doesn't require a prescription.

I'm both an adjunct assistant professor of medicine and a practicing physician. As a family doctor, I see the common cold every day. My patients are usually skeptical when I first recommend nasal saline irrigation. However, they frequently return to tell me that this practice has changed their life. Not only does it help with upper respiratory viruses, but it also helps manage allergies, chronic congestion, postnasal drip and recurrent sinus infections.

What is nasal saline irrigation?

Nasal saline irrigation is a process by which the nasal cavity is bathed in a saltwater solution. In some studies, this is accomplished using a pump-action spray bottle. In others, participants used a traditional neti pot, which is a vessel resembling a teapot.

This practice of nasal irrigation originated in the Ayurvedic tradition, which is a system of alternative medicine from India dating back more than 5,000 years.

The neti pot can be traced back to the 15th century. It garnered mainstream interest in the U.S. in 2012 after Dr. Oz demonstrated it on the "Oprah Winfrey Show." But it's not the only device that has historically been employed for such purposes. Ancient Greek and Roman physicians had their own nasal lavage devices. Such practices were even discussed in medical journals such as The Lancet over a century ago, in 1902.

How does nasal saline irrigation work?

Nasal saline has a few key benefits. First, it physically flushes debris out of the nasal passage. This not only includes mucus and crust, but also the virus itself, along with allergens and other environmental contaminants.

Second, salt water is slightly lower on the pH scale compared with fresh water. Its acidity creates an environment that is inhospitable for viruses and makes it harder for them to replicate.

Third, nasal saline helps restore the actions of part of our natural defense system, which is composed of microscopic, hairlike projections called cilia that line the surface of the nasal passage. These cilia beat in a coordinated fashion to act like an escalator, propelling viruses and other foreign particles out of the body. Nasal saline irrigation helps keep this system running effectively.

What the research shows

A study of more than 11,000 people published in The Lancet in 2024 demonstrated that nasal saline irrigation, initiated at the first sign of symptoms and performed up to six times per day, reduced the duration of symptomatic illness by approximately two days. Meanwhile, smaller studies have reported that the reduced duration of illness could be as high as four days.

Research has also demonstrated that nasal saline irrigation can help prevent the spread of illness. A study in hospitalized patients showed that after detection of COVID-19 via nasal swab, nasal saline irrigation performed every four hours over a 16-hour period decreased COVID-19 viral load by 8.9 percent. Meanwhile, the viral load in the control group continued to increase during that time.

The benefits of nasal saline also extend beyond acute infectious illnesses. When performed regularly by patients with allergic rhinitis, also known as hay fever, a meta-analysis of 10 randomized controlled trials showed that nasal saline irrigation can enable a 62 percent reduction in the use of allergy medications. It's also effective for chronic congestion, postnasal drip and recurrent sinus infections.

Why it matters

Besides helping patients feel better faster, one of the most valuable benefits of nasal saline irrigation is that its use can help decrease unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions, which are a major contributor to antibiotic resistance.

It is well established that antibiotics do not shorten the duration or reduce the severity of respiratory tract infections. Despite this, studies have shown that patients are happier when they leave their doctor's office with an antibiotic prescription in hand.

This may be why 10 million inappropriate antibiotic prescriptions are given each year for viral respiratory tract infections. In one study of more than 49,000 patient encounters for respiratory infections, antibiotics were unnecessarily prescribed to 42.4 percent of patients.

One reason patients with upper respiratory viral infections tend to initially feel better with antibiotics is because of their off-target, anti-inflammatory properties. However, this benefit can be better achieved with anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen or naproxen, that can be taken in conjunction with nasal saline irrigation.

Overall, nasal saline irrigation is a cheap, effective, evidence-based alternative that will not only shorten the duration of illness but also prevent its spread, minimize the need for unnecessary antibiotics and keep people out of the hospital.

How to do it

For those who want to try it, you don't need anything fancy. Even a neti pot is not necessary. Many pharmacies sell salt water in a container with a nozzle and even spray bottles that can be refilled with a homemade saltwater solution.

You'll mix approximately half a teaspoon of non-iodized salt with 1 cup of water. It's important for your safety that the water be either distilled water or boiled for at least five minutes and then cooled to destroy any harmful bacteria. You can also add a pinch of baking soda to reduce any potential sting.

Note that saltier solutions are not more effective. However, some studies have suggested natural seawater, due to its additional minerals such as magnesium, potassium and calcium, could offer even greater benefits. Saltwater solutions can also be purchased commercially, which might be worth a try for those with an insufficient response to saline alone.

You can use nasal saline irrigation after any potential exposure to an infectious illness. For best results, you'll want to start irrigating the nasal passage at the first sign of an infection. You can repeat rinses throughout the day as often as needed for the duration of the illness. At minimum, you'll want to irrigate the nasal passages every morning and evening. You can also consider gargling salt water as an adjunctive therapy.

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ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

How to use period products safely

By JESSICA BETHEL MD, MPH and MEGAN YANNY, MD, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Starting their period is a big deal for adolescents. It marks a turning point in their lives where puberty becomes the new normal and change is happening all over their body. Undoubtedly, adolescents are going to have questions, and for those about period products, safety is the biggest factor.

Tampons can be super helpful, since they can be worn during swimming or other activities when a pad might not be convenient or possible. Tampons are safe if used properly, but if left in too long can lead to toxic shock syndrome, a rare disease caused by an infection where bacteria release toxins into the body that can lead to organ damage (including kidney, liver and heart failure), shock and even death.

Changes in how tampons are made and education about safe use of tampons have decreased the rates of toxic shock syndrome. Even with these improvements, it is important to follow all directions on the packaging and to wash hands before attempting to use tampons. Tampon users should use the lowest absorbency tampon you need, change them every 4 to 8 hours, and throw them away after each use.

Symptoms to keep an eye out for include fevers or chills, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, sunburn-like rash, confusion and fatigue. If noticed, contact your doctor as soon as you can.

Recently, alternatives to tampons, like menstrual cups, have become more widely available. These products are easy to find and can be used while swimming or playing sports. They are also reusable, which people may like since it can lessen waste and be more friendly to the environment than other menstrual products.

Often, menstrual cups are made with medical-grade silicon, which discourages the growth of bacteria. However, bacteria can still grow on menstrual cups and toxic shock syndrome has been reported in people using these products.

Refer to the specific care guidelines for your menstrual cup, but generally most products recommend washing the menstrual cup after each use with water and soap, boiling the menstrual cup in between periods, and removing the product at least every 12 hours.

Period underwear are a great reusable option and are even easier to use than menstrual cups. Because period underwear is outside your body, it is not a risk for toxic shock syndrome. However, they still should be cleaned or washed as instructed on the packaging.

Tampons and other menstrual products are safe when used properly. As always, talk to your pediatrician about any questions or concerns you have about period products or toxic shock syndrome.

Jessica Bethel MD, MPH, is a pediatric hospital medicine fellow at the University of Wisconsin. Megan Yanny, MD, FAAP, is a board-certified general pediatrician and assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

Photos by Alejandro A Alvarez / The Philadelphia Inquirer / TNS

Bracken Babula, a Jefferson primary care doctor, has been using ambient listening during his patient exams to improve the quality of his medical notes.

At some doctors' offices, AI is listening in the exam room

By SARAH GANTZ
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

PHILADELPHIA — Bracken Babula starts patient visits these days by closing the exam room door, and asking if they mind him recording their conversation. He hits a button on his mobile phone, checks that it is recording, and sits back in his seat to listen.

In the past, the Jefferson Health primary care doctor would have spent the visit furiously typing notes while listening to his patient, unable to make consistent eye contact and fully engage in conversation.

But for the past year, he has been using an artificial intelligence tool that does the listening and note-taking for him. When the visit is over, Babula ends the recording. Within minutes, a note record appears on his computer screen, organized by sections, summarizing the main points of their conversation, the different medical issues discussed, and recommended next steps.

"I can face my patient and talk to them and hear their whole conversation," Babula said. "I spend the same amount of time, but have a much higher-quality note than before."

Health systems in Philadelphia and across the country have been adopting artificial intelligence for years in ways invisible to patients, such as using the technology to comb radiology scans for signs of cancer, or improve appointment scheduling. Now so-called ambient listening and AI scribes are among the artificial intelligence tools that patients are beginning to see in exam rooms.

The technology has significant appeal in health care, where research shows doctors spend more time documenting patient exams and maintaining medical records than they do interacting with their patients. A recent study by University of Pennsylvania researchers found the tools can reduce the amount of time doctors spend on paperwork at home, after their work day is over.

Earlier this fall, Jefferson announced a plan to reclaim 10 million hours of clinicians' time by 2028 through artificial intelligence tools, including ambient listening that can help doctors work more efficiently. Some 1,200 Penn Medicine providers have been using an AI scribe to assist with note-taking.

But medical ethicists warn that health systems must be cautious of a fast-growing health care AI market that is largely unregulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which oversees medical devices and medications. The FDA's digital health committee is exploring ways it could regulate AI in medical devices in the future.

Recording errors could lead to incorrect medication doses, for example, and the scribe may struggle to understand foreign accents.

Bracken Babula demonstrates how to use an AI scribe tool in an exam room at Jefferson's Honickman Center.

> 'I can face my patient and talk to them and *hear their whole conversation*. I spend the same amount of time, but have a *much higher-quality note* than before.'
>
> **DR. BRACKEN BABULA**

Health systems must also ensure that patients consent to being recorded and that the private health information they share is secure.

"It puts a lot of onus on the health systems to be careful adopters and kick the tires," said I. Glenn Cohen, a bioethicist and deputy dean at Harvard Law School.

Benefits of ambient listening

Ambient listening and AI scribe tools do more than simply record a conversation and provide a transcript.

The programs can distinguish individual voices and omit details that aren't relevant – such as brief small-talk about the weather or a pet.

When the conversation is over, the technology produces a comprehensive medical note. The record is no simple transcript: It summarizes the most important details, broken into sections about each medical condition discussed, the doctor's recommendations, and what next steps the doctor said the patient should take.

The approach has changed the way Dina Capalongo, an internal medicine doctor at Penn, interacts with her patients, because her attention is no longer divided between listening to her patients and taking fastidious notes.

After greeting them, she explains the AI scribe tool and asks if they mind if she records their visit – most patients agree.

She opens up their electronic medical record through a secure app on her phone, then finds the green button to begin recording.

Capalongo has been using for about a month the AI scribe tool Penn designed in-house. She finds herself explaining to patients parts of the exam that she needs to narrate, so that it can become part of the scribe tool's record. The process helps patients better understand what she's doing, she said.

"They're hearing me say, 'Heart is regular,' and knowing why I'm touching the inside of their leg," she said.

When the exam is over, Capalongo ends the recording and within minutes – usually before she leaves the room – the program pops up a written medical note on her computer screen.

The scribe tools require doctors to review all their AI-created notes for any errors and approve them before they become a formal part of a patient's record.

Capalongo and Babula, the Jefferson doctor, both find the AI-created notes more comprehensive than what they may have written on their own, and rarely have errors. Doctors may correct the spelling of a colleague's name or delete an irrelevant detail.

A Penn study involving 46 providers found that AI scribe and ambient listening tools contributed to a 20 percent decrease in the time doctors spent interacting with electronic health records during and after patient visits. The amount of time they spent on documentation after work hours dropped by 30 percent, according to findings published in JAMA Network Open in February.

Capalongo was not involved in the study, but said she thinks that the tool has also saved her time.

Challenges of AI in health care

Despite the promise of greater efficiency for doctors and improved patient interactions, ethicists caution that ambient listening and AI scribe tools can have drawbacks.

Doctors who don't read over the AI-created notes carefully could miss errors, such as an incorrect medication dosage. As using AI notes becomes routine to clinicians, the likelihood that they read over the details quickly or skim the notes may increase over time, said Cohen, who wrote an invited response to the Penn study that was also published by JAMA.

Less sophisticated tools may misinterpret foreign accents, leading to inaccurate notes.

Artificial intelligence tools such as ambient listening also pose privacy challenges. Many states, including Pennsylvania, require both parties to agree to voice recording, which means doctors must be trained on how to talk to patients about the technology and answer their questions.

Another challenge for health systems is how to handle sensitive topics that patients may not want recorded, such as a discussion about domestic violence.

The technology could also impact how patient medical records are used in medical malpractice cases, as they provide the most comprehensive history of what patients discussed with their doctors, when details of their health were first documented, and the steps providers took in patient care.

But ambient listening tools do not necessarily create a verbatim transcript – rather they use artificial intelligence to compose a note that highlights the most important points, which can later be edited by the doctor.

"You're producing multiple records – the recording, the transcription summary, and then the final version the doctor has approved," he said. "What's the policy on retention of these documents?"

Forging ahead

Penn and Jefferson said they are aware of the risks of AI and are approaching the technology cautiously.

Hospital administrators are bombarded with AI product pitches, and must carefully vet which tools are safe enough for patients and worth exploring, said Baligh Yehia, president of Jefferson Health.

AI tools that can improve the connection between patients and doctors by taking away administrative burdens are his priority.

Jefferson expects to introduce ambient listening tools in its emergency departments soon. It's already being used in primary care and other outpatient offices.

The system is also considering how ambient listening could be used to improve nurse hand-off notes.

As such tools become more widely available to Jefferson doctors, the system is training providers to have in-depth conversations with patients about how the technology works, and how their private health information is protected.

Penn first experimented with AI in administrative settings, such as record-keeping, billing, and appointment scheduling. The system wanted to test the technology in ways that did not directly affect patient care, said Mitchell Schnall, a radiologist and senior vice president for data and technology solutions at Penn.

When patients call the general Penn Medicine number, an AI assistant asks them to describe what they need – "cancel an appointment" or "billing question" – and directs them to the right place, reducing phone wait times.

More recently, Penn has begun introducing AI into the exam room. The system built its own scribe, now in use by some 1,200 providers in ambulatory and outpatient offices.

Penn is still exploring how ambient listening could benefit emergency departments, where efficiency is key but lots of background noise could muddy recordings.

Using the tools safely, local leaders say, also requires ensuring the technology doesn't replace human touch in health care.

"There's a human in the loop every time," he said. "You want to make sure everything is accurate and you're acting responsibly."

FINANCE

A fourth tier of cards – upper-middle-class cards, if you will – has been introduced to fill the gap between mid-tier cards with annual fees around $100 and premium cards with annual fees of $500 and more.

Dreamstime / TNS

A fourth tier of credit cards has begun to emerge

By TED ROSSMAN
Bankrate.com (TNS)

For a long time, credit cards have generally fallen into three tiers: no-annual-fee cards, mid-tier cards with annual fees around $95 and premium cards with annual fees measured in the hundreds (these used to cluster around $400 or $500 per year, now it's more like $800 or $900 in many cases).

The upmarket migration of luxury credit cards such as the Chase Sapphire Reserve and American Express Platinum Card has created a large (and growing) gap between the traditional middle and premium tiers. And we all know that businesses see gaps and like to fill them with profit.

In this case, they've begun to do that by introducing a fourth tier of cards – upper-middle-class cards, if you will – and I expect more cards at that level are on the way. This is good news for the many households left behind by the soaring annual fees of premium cards, but underwhelmed by the traditional mid-tier offerings.

There's a lot of potential value in this emerging market segment, as well as opportunities for card issuers to be even more creative when it comes to what this group is interested in. For example, where's the credit card with elevated rewards or statement credits for daycares and summer camps or airport lounge access for the whole family?

So let's take a look at the current landscape and make some predictions about what might be coming.

Luxury cards have become much pricier

If you want the most comprehensive airport lounge access and the longest list of travel and lifestyle credits, you're better off with a really high-end card such as the Amex Platinum or Chase Sapphire Reserve. But you're going to pay a handsome price for those privileges: These cards have raised their annual fees by hundreds of dollars in recent years, to $895 and $795, respectively. You're not getting champagne travel on a beer budget anymore. Recent fee increases have promoted an even greater air of exclusivity – champagne travel on a caviar budget, if you will.

I don't see that trend reversing anytime soon. We haven't reached the top of the annual fee mountain yet. Within the next few years, one or both of these cards will likely eclipse the $1,000 annual fee threshold – and there will be plenty of people willing to pay it. The high-end consumer is doing quite well. Moody's, for instance, reports that the top 10 percent of earners now account for 50 percent of all spending (a record high). Card issuers are tripping over each other in an effort to woo these heavy spenders.

But there's inevitably going to be some attrition, too, and I see that as a feature of the strategy, not a bug.

If everyone is special, then no one is

As airport lounge access has become an increasingly widespread credit card perk, some cardholders complain that airport lounges have become too crowded. Certain issuers have trimmed back guest privileges as a potential antidote (the Capital One Venture X Rewards Credit Card, for instance, is cutting free guest benefits for most cardholders in early 2026).

Another lever that card issuers are pulling is to set higher barriers to entry, such as the higher annual fees announced over the summer on the Amex Platinum and Chase Sapphire Reserve. And if some cardholders downgrade or cancel their cards as a result, that shouldn't surprise the issuers. They might even welcome it to some extent, if their remaining premium cardholders feel extra special and others switch to one of the company's other products. Introducing more "premium lite" cards could help keep them in the fold.

All of this points to the necessity of an expanded grouping of credit cards targeted at the mass affluent. After all, HENRYs (high earners not rich yet) need credit cards, too. Credit card marketers will be smart to lean further in this direction, because this is an already lucrative segment of the population which should become even more so in the future as careers grow and incomes expand.

What 'fourth-tier' cards already exist?

There are potentially exciting cards coming as issuers work to tap into this in-between market, but waiting for banks to introduce new "premium lite" cards isn't going to meet your needs today. The good news is that there are a few existing products that fall squarely in that upper-middle tier when it comes to their annual fees and, to some extent, their benefits.

American Express Gold Card

The best (and most longstanding) example of a "mid-tier plus" credit card is the American Express Gold Card. With a $325 annual fee, it's hardly cheap, but it's a lot more affordable than the $895 you need to shell out every year for the Platinum Card. The Gold Card's list of perks isn't nearly as extensive (airport lounge access is a notable omission), but it gives a generous 4X points on a hefty amount of restaurant and U.S. supermarket purchases (up to $50,000 and $25,000 in annual purchases, respectively, then 1X points after that). That appeals to big spenders of all kinds, whether you're a growing family or a household made up of a couple of DINKs (dual-income, no kids).

Gold cardholders also earn elevated rewards on many flight and hotel purchases, along with hundreds of dollars in annual credits for a wide variety of travel, dining and rideshare expenses. This is a solid option, particularly for high-spending foodies who like to travel but can't justify the Platinum Card's lofty price tag.

Capital One Venture X

The Capital One Venture X Rewards Credit Card debuted in 2021 to challenge the Sapphire Reserve and Amex Platinum at the top of the market, but its $395 annual fee is now less than half of what those other cards charge. It beats the Gold Card on airport lounge access, although it doesn't have as many everyday perks. The Venture X is a hybrid example that falls in between the traditional middle tier and luxury rivals that recently became much more expensive. Capital One has an opportunity to position this card as more of a mass-market play.

Citi/AAdvantage Globe Card

Last month, Citi and American Airlines launched another card into the growing mix of offerings that sit between the traditional middle and high tiers. The Citi / AAdvantage Globe™ Mastercard, which has a $350 annual fee, gives cardholders a taste of luxury at a more affordable price point than many rivals. Among other benefits, customers get four airport lounge passes each year, up to $240 in annual Turo credits and a few hundred dollars in additional credits ranging from in-flight purchases to personal training, live entertainment, expedited security screening and more.

Bilt Mastercard

In some cases, issuers already have products that they're working to adapt for this upwardly mobile, not-premium-yet set.

Bilt, for instance, is doing some fascinating things that appeal to young professionals. They may be HENRYs today, but they could be truly rich soon. On the face of it, the Bilt Mastercard is the card for renters. It's the only credit card that allows everyone to pay rent (and earn rewards) without a transaction fee. But it's also much more than that.

Bilt offers many compelling rewards opportunities ranging from rent payments to travel, dining and more. Plus, it features a really generous list of transfer partners and a host of other incentives that emphasize spending in your local neighborhood. Bilt has created its own loyalty ecosystem and has teased two new cards coming in 2026 that will build upon its no-annual-fee roots. The forthcoming $495 annual fee version (details to be announced) feels like it will fit the upper-middle-class credit card narrative. There will also be a $95 annual fee version with a shorter set of benefits and a lower barrier to entry.

Interestingly, Bilt is expanding upon its renter roots with a path to homeownership program that includes credit building and mortgage rewards. The company keeps working to appeal to the upwardly mobile in very unique ways.

The bottom line

Between fast-growing fintech startups like Bilt and established players such as American Express, Citi and Capital One, credit card issuers have begun carving out a new niche in the traditional credit card landscape. It's not just "no fee, $95 fee or $795 fee" anymore. There's a growing group of "upper-middle-class" credit cards with annual fees in the $300 to $500 range. I expect this category to continue to expand as luxury cards move further upmarket and leave a gap in their wake.

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Is mobile banking safe? How to actually protect your money

By LIBBY WELLS
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Mobile banking is how a majority of Americans manage their money. But it's also a growing target for fraud. The good news: when done right, it can actually be safer than swiping your debit card at a store.

Here's what experts say about how to keep your money – and your data – safe, plus how to choose banks that prioritize your security.

Is mobile banking safe?

In short, yes – if you're smart about it.

"If you download the mobile app from a secure store, that is just as safe as visiting a bank branch," says Paul Benda, senior vice president for operational risk and cybersecurity at American Bankers Association.

Banks use high-end encryption and multi-factor authentication to protect your data. In many ways, your phone is your most secure bank branch – but only if you take precautions.

The biggest mobile banking threats

Cyberattacks evolve fast, but the FBI points to two growing forms of smartphone-based fraud:

■ App-based banking Trojans. Hidden inside unrelated apps, these pieces of malware "wake up" when you open your banking app and mimic its login screen to steal your credentials.

■ Fake banking apps. Designed to look like real ones, they trick users into entering login info that's sent straight to criminals.

Only download apps using the links from your bank's official website – never from social media ads or third-party app stores.

6 best practices to protect yourself from mobile banking fraud

■ Download verified apps only. Start at your bank's website and follow its link to the App Store or Google Play. Confirm the developer name and read reviews before downloading. Never download banking apps from open forums or third-party websites.

■ Turn on multi-factor authentication. Two-step verification adds another wall between your account and hackers. It requires you to prove your identity with at least two pieces of information – typically a password plus a confirmation code sent to your phone.

Dreamstime / TNS

Mobile bank alerts, which help customers stay aware of their finances and watch for suspicious activity, are one of the advantages unique to online banking.

Even if your password is stolen, your phone verification code keeps thieves out.

■ Use strong, unique passwords. Mix upper- and lowercase letters, numbers and symbols – and never reuse passwords across accounts. Do not save your passwords in your browser – instead, use a reputable password manager.

■ Avoid public Wi-Fi. Free networks are easy for hackers to monitor. When in doubt, use your mobile data or a trusted home network.

■ Spot phishing and "smishing." Phishing emails often look legitimate, as if they are really from your bank. But they are designed to trick you into revealing personal information or downloading malware. Smishing uses the same tactics via text messages.

■ Set up account alerts. A quick notification from your bank about transactions on your account can help you detect potential fraudulent activity. Most banks offer customizable alerts via email, text or their app.

Time matters with fraud – the faster you catch it, the better protected you are under Regulation E, which limits your liability if you report unauthorized transactions within two business days.

How banks protect your accounts

Banks and credit unions spend billions each year defending against cyber threats – and they're financially on the hook for most unauthorized transactions.

Under Regulation E, your liability for electronic fraud is limited to $50 if reported within two business days, and up to $500 afterward. Anything beyond that is covered by your financial institution.

Most banks also carry FDIC insurance, protecting up to $250,000 per depositor, per account category.

While your bank invests in cybersecurity, your job is to keep your access points secure – starting with your phone.

ENTERTAINMENT

From left, Natalia Dyer, Charlie Heaton, Finn Wolfhard, Noah Schnapp, David Harbour, Winona Ryder and Millie Bobby Brown in Season 4 of "Stranger Things.
Netflix / TNS

'Stranger Things' has cast a spell on metro Atlanta for a decade

By RODNEY HO
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (TNS)

ATLANTA — During the summer of 2016, metro Atlanta was a busy hive of TV and film production activity, benefiting from the last gasp of cable dominance.

The biggest basic cable show was AMC's monster hit "The Walking Dead," based out of Senoia. FX's genre-twisting, award-winning "Atlanta" was weeks from its debut. And Tyler Perry was still working with OWN, bringing millions of fans to his soap "The Haves and the Have Nots."

But streaming was about to eat cable's lunch, inexorably changing the way people consume media. And Netflix was ready to take charge, fishing around for original ideas to hook its growing subscriber base. The streaming service took a chance on unknown twin brothers Matt and Ross Duffer, who had a concept that became "Stranger Things."

Nearly a decade later, the series returns for its fifth and final season with eight episodes spread over three release dates: Wednesday, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve. It's such a big deal, thefinal episode will screen in 350 movie theaters nationwide Dec. 31-Jan. 1.

An ensemble science fiction homage to 1980s films such as "The Goonies" and "Stand By Me," "Stranger Things" is about a group of suburban kids grappling with horrific creatures from an alternate dimension dubbed the Upside Down.

The series was originally set in Montauk, Long Island. But neither Montauk nor Wilmington, North Carolina, also a candidate for the show, looked remotely like the '80s anymore.

"As much as we liked the waterfront setting, we also liked the idea of it being Everywhere USA," Matt Duffer said in an interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "We grew up in North Carolina in the suburbs. The show pays tribute to our childhood. When we scouted Atlanta, the woods felt the same, the houses felt the same. It just made sense to be our Everywhere USA town. That's how Hawkins was born."

They chose to make Hawkins a fictional town in Indiana instead of the South for one reason: "We cannot stand when actors fake Southern accents," Ross said. "Very few can do it well."

'A grand slam'

A decade ago, studio space in Georgia was hard to find. Netflix didn't want to be locked out so it signed a five-year deal with EUE/Screen Gems by Lakewood Amphitheatre near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. That became the home base for interiors of "Stranger Things" for the next decade.

"I've worked with 'Dawson's Creek' and 'One Tree Hill,'" said Chris Cooney, former chief executive officer at EUE/Screen Gems, which was purchased by Cinespace Studios in 2023. "Those were home runs. 'Stranger Things' was a grand slam. They were great tenants. And the show really did bring a patina of success to what you can do in Atlanta."

The Duffer brothers praised metro Atlanta's diversity of settings.

"We liked there was a big city," Matt said. "That was the hub. But you didn't have to drive very far to find incredible rural settings. Anything we wanted existed: the quarry, the lab,the school, the mall, the countryside. We shot for 10 years and never ran out of cool locations. It allowed us to write whatever popped in our heads."

A challenge arose in Season 5 when two key locations were torn down while the show was still in production: Patrick Henry High School in Stockbridge, which doubled as Hawkins Middle and High School, and a former psychiatric hospital at Emory University's Briarcliff campus, which was used as Hawkins Lab.

"The school in particular was extremely stressful," Matt said. "We had to shoot those scenes up front and get them out of the way. The lab was less of an issue. Luckily, demolition kept getting pushed back, or else we would have been in real trouble. We shot inside the lab for the finale very early before we had even finished the script."

As grateful as the showrunners are for the devoted worldwide following "Stranger Things" has generated, they didn't want intruders posting spoilers online. Netflix spent $4.4 million on security personnel for Season 5 alone, according to the Georgia film office.

It turns out, the fans who showed up to watch exterior scenes weren't the problem, Matt noted. "It was the paparazzi that were more annoying. They would use drones. It was a little frustrating. Netflix did a good job keeping them away. I was amazed how few leaks there were."

Eggo waffles to Kate Bush

The show was an immediate hit when it debuted in 2016. With the arguable exception of "The Walking Dead," "Stranger Things" has been metro Atlanta's most influential TV show since the state introduced its generous tax credit system in 2008.

Because of Netflix's international footprint, viewers in more than 190 countries fell in love with Eleven, Hopper and Demogorgons. The show boosted Eggo Waffle and Dungeons & Dragons sales. It brought largely forgotten 1980s songs like Limahl's "Neverending Story " and Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" back to the Billboard pop charts. Roller-skating rinks noticed increased traffic after Season 4. And the show minted stars out of relative unknowns, like Millie Bobby Brown, David Harbour and Sadie Sink.

Several actors enjoyed their time in Georgia so much, they moved here, including Brown, who now owns a farm in rural Georgia with an array of donkeys, goats, cows and horses.

When Sink, 23, entered Season 2 at age 14 as skateboard loving rebel Max, she was daunted by the show's popularity. "The stakes were high," she said. "It was really scary. But I was welcomed with open arms by cast and crew. I eventually found my footing."

She, like all the kid actors, spent copious hours in a makeshift classroom completing their education requirements. Occasionally their teacher would take them on field trips. Sink's favorite place: the Atlanta Botanical Garden. "I ended up going there every weekend. I loved it!"

When they got older, the actors explored the city, hanging out in Cabbagetown, hitting spots like low-key Italian eatery BoccaLupo, hipster bar 97 Estoria and bohemian bistro Carroll Street Cafe. They would inevitably get recognized, but Sink didn't mind the attention. "People knew we're shooting here so they didn't question it was us," she said. "They knew."

If you watch

First four episodes debuted Nov. 26 on Netflix. Three more episodes debut Dec. 25, and the series finale debuts Dec. 31.

Sink's character became a focal point during Season 4, and her confrontation with antagonist Vecna almost killed Max. Entering Season 5, Max is alive but in a coma.

Playing Max for five seasons had a profound impact on the young actress.

"She had this natural confidence and toughness about her, and that helped me growing up as I was trying to find my voice," said Sink, who received a Tony nomination earlier this year for "John Proctor is a Villain."

Jackson becomes Hawkins

On a windless, clear fall day in mid-November, 21-year-old Cannon Dail, wearing a Hawkins High School letter jacket, was on the tail end of a 45-minute "Stranger Things" walking tour of Jackson town square.

He entered an alleyway off the square that featured the curious spray-painted message on a piece of wood: "Welcome to the Alley Fight Scene."

"This is where Steve and Jonathan got into a fight Season 1, episode 6," Dail told the Campos family of six from Newnan, who drove 55 miles east for the tour to celebrate their daughter Isabella's 10th birthday.

When he asked Isabella and her 7-year-old sister, Audrey, to put up their dukes and reenact the scene in question, they gleefully agreed as their parents snapped photos.

"This is so much fun," Isabella said, her eyes wide, a smile plastered on her face. She has seen the first four seasons at least four times.

Dail, a tour guide for a year, said he had never seen such a young child so enraptured by his recitation of "Stranger Things" factoids. As a rabid fan of "Stranger Things" himself, he visited Jackson in 2019 as a young teen from Arkansas but found little trace of its role as the stand-in for Hawkins.

Last year, Dail returned and was thrilled to find that Hannah and Cameron Thompson had opened Hawkins Headquarters, an '80s-themed merch shop in a former Army/Navy surplus store. He quickly signed on to be a tour guide, handing out Viewfinders to attendees to show moments in the show that match up to the locations he highlights.

The store includes "Stranger Things" murals, an arcade with '80s games like Dig Dug, a wall of MTV-style '80s era TVs and props, like the actual safe Hopper and Joyce opened in Season 3. There's also a countertop where tour attendees share pineapple pizza while partaking in trivia.

Hawkins Headquarters is open daily and holds 17 walking tours a week. A revived bus tour returns in January after Season 5 comes out. Visitors have come from every state and more than 75 countries, from Dubai to Brazil: "They'll grab an Uber and come 45 minutes from the airport," she said.

The Thompsons aren't the only entrepreneurs who have jumped on the "Stranger Things" wave.

In Fayetteville, the Byers home was turned into an Airbnb. In Powder Springs, Hopper's cabin became an escape room.

Douglasville, home to the fictional Palace Arcade, Family Video and other sites, recently held its fifth annual "Stranger Things" block party that drew 3,000 people. Fabiano's Pizzeria temporarily became Surfer Boy Pizza, a roller-skating rink was built on O'Neal Plaza, and the city created a walk-through "Upside Down" experience.

But Jackson – seat of Butts County 45 miles southeast of downtown Atlanta and home to Lt. Gov. Burt Jones – has worked especially hard to take advantage of its "Stranger Things" ties.

Inside Lucy Lu's Coffee Cafe across from Hawkins Headquarters, a life-sized replica of Max hovers over the cashier counter while Vecna commands control of her body. Next door, there's a massive mural featuring several of the show's characters. A former Radio Shack is now an escape room featuring three "Stranger Things" scenarios.

A free "Stranger Things" event in October on the square attracted 6,000 fans. Mayor Carlos Duffy, who credited the Thompsons for sparking the square's revival, said the town now gets about 300 visitors a week, a number that has increased in the weeks leading up to the debut of the final season.

Hannah Thompson is especially excited about Season 5, because so much of it was shot in Jackson. Netflix initially wanted to close off a portion of the square for three months for filming, she said, but businesses balked. Instead, the show used Jackson for five weeks and built a replica of the square to scale on a backlot at Cinespace Studios.

Business at Hawkins Headquarters is up 20 percent year over year, she said, but she is anticipating a gangbuster December. "There's something to be said for the economic impact of fandom even in tight times."

Going big then going home

One of the first series Netflix produced in house, "Stranger Things" received a modest Season 1 budget. Once it blew up, execs gave the Duffer Brothers more freedom to grow the story and amp up the special effects. They also showed patience as gaps between seasons grew longer.

It took them nearly three years between Seasons 3 and 4 because of the pandemic. The actors and writers strikes in 2023 delayed Season 5, which comes nearly three-and-a-half years after Season 4.

This also meant the kids, many of whom were just 11 or 12 when the show began, are now college age and beyond. Although the timeline of the show has gone from 1983 to 1987, nearly all the key actors are now of legal drinking age.

Wardrobe and makeup had to work harder Season 5 to ensure the kids look of age, though for Sink, playing six years younger was not a stretch given what her character has been through. "She's pretty weathered for a 16 year old," Sink said.

Despite the long breaks between seasons, the show's popularity doesn't appear to have waned. The Season 5 release date announcement received 250 million social media impressions in its first four days in late spring, Netflix said. The show also reappeared in Netflix's top 10 most viewed shows earlier this month in anticipation of its return.

The show's cast of regulars has now grown to 20 with the addition of Linda Hamilton of "Terminator" fame donning an unflattering '80s hairdo.

Lee Thomas, deputy commissioner of the Georgia Film Office, said 7,700 Georgians worked on the show over the past decade, including 3,737 during Season 5. Netflix has pumped more than $800 million into the state economy since 2015, she noted.

"It's a crown jewel I'm going to miss terribly," said location scout Tony Holley, one of the first people Netflix hired in 2015. "I did that show from stem to stern. I wish we were working on Season 6!"

Holley joined several of his location colleagues earlier this month at SCAD in Midtown Atlanta to screen the first episode of Season 5.

"When I was in the bubble," he said, "it was whack-a-mole trying to keep people off sets and ameliorating residents and businesses. Now I just feel pride seeing my locations become tourist attractions."

Julia Fredette of East Atlanta, who worked in the props department, came to the event wearing a Bradley's Big Buy jacket that crew members received as wrap gifts at the end of shooting Season 5 last year. (Bradley's Big Buy, which is a Piggly Wiggly in Palmetto, was featured in Seasons 1 and 2 and makes a return appearance Season 5.)

"Getting a job with 'Stranger Things' is like winning the lottery," Fredette said.

Compared to previous shows she's worked on, "everything was bigger," she said. "We had so many tools at our disposal. It was a dream. And I got to work with some of the most talented people in the business."

"'Stranger Things' is a tight-knit family," said Devin Morales, co-department head for makeup with previous credits like "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" and "Hillbilly Elegy." She even had her 12-year-old daughter, Ayla, work as a background actor. "Every department brought their A game. Everyone cared about their job. We did not phone it in."

"Stranger Things" was a bit like lightning in a bottle for metro Atlanta, a project that captured the zeitgeist, matched only in size in recent years by the Marvel and DC superhero films.

And the Duffer brothers are not tamping down their ambitions to hit it big again. They have two big-budget series coming up for Netflix, neither shot in Georgia: "The Boroughs," which landed in New Mexico, and "Something Very Bad is Going to Happen," which shot in Toronto.

But they said they hope to work in metro Atlanta in the future.

"It's really like a second home to us," Ross said.

"We're Southern," Matt noted. "The sweet tea. The barbecue. Everyone is so friendly. I just wish there was a Bojangles closer to Inman Park. That's my one Atlanta complaint."

MOVIE REVIEW

Disney / TNS

Nick Wilde (voiced by Jason Bateman), left, and Judy Hopps (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin) in "Zootopia 2."

'Zootopia 2' has animal magnetism lacking in original

By MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio) (TNS)

'Zootopia 2'

★★★

MPA rating: PG (for action/violence and rude humor)

Running time: 1:48

How to watch: In theaters

I remember how I felt watching "Zootopia" in 2016: This offering from Walt Disney Animation Studios, while colorful, clever and boasting appealing characters, is far too slow for a movie aimed at children.

(It didn't help that the filmmakers leaned into this, let's say, relaxed pacing with a sequence involving a sa-looooooowww-ww-moving sloth working at the bureau of motor vehicles. It was meant to be funny, of course, but I found it flat and frustrating.)

Well, I thought, this will be one of those Disney movies that comes and goes without making much of an impact.

"Zootopia" made more than $1 billion at the global box office.

As a result, I was surprised that several years came and went without a big-screen "Zootopia" sequel. We finally are getting that endeavor with "Zootopia 2," zipping into theaters this week.

And I do mean "zipping."

"Zootopia 2" keeps what worked about its predecessor while telling a rather ambitious story at a brisk clip.

A buddy-cop comedy at heart, it's another tale centered around rookie bunny officer Judy Hopps (Ginnifer Goodwin) and Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman), a former con-artist fox who's trying to go straight and make it work as Judy's partner in anti-crime in the sprawling animal metropolis that is Zootopia.

Set soon after the events of the first flick, "2" sees Judy and Nick working to earn respect in the police department, with Chief Bogo (Idris Elba) assigning them to merely observe as other officers investigate a crooked customs inspector. Well, he would have given them that order, had they not already bolted to the port to try to get the goods on the animal suspect.

Judy and Nick soon are on extremely thin ice with Bogo because the ensuing chase – an elaborate few minutes of dazzling animation – leads to a lot of city damage.

Judy and Nick are also trying to figure out how to work better together, attending a Partners in Crisis support group meeting and each taking home a copy of the book "Partnerships for Dummies." (Nick uses his to balance an imperfect coffee table in his messy apartment.)

Of course, Judy can't just sit on the sidelines, roping Nick into following a trail of clues leading to the grand Zootennial gala. Evidence of wrongdoing points to the wealthy and influential Lynxley family, led by patriarch Milton (David Strathairn).

Flash Slothmore (voiced by Raymond S. Persi) in "Zootopia 2."

Fortunately for Judy, she's already befriended Pawbert Lynxley (Andy Samberg), a family outcast. He's working with a pit viper, Gary De'Snake (Ke Huy Quan), to try to expose a dark Lynxley secret, one that would make it better for all snakes – unwelcome in Zootopia for decades.

Judy wants to help Gary at all costs, but Nick has more of a the-world-is-what-it-is attitude and believes no case is worth their lives. This is one of the stronger sources of conflict for a pair of cartoon characters, and it's part of what makes "Zootopia 2" such a rich experience.

Written by the returning Jared Bush – who co-directs with another "Zootopia" veteran, Byron Howard – "Zootopia 2" also explores adult themes, none larger than racism, which is laudable. Importantly, though, it does so in a way that doesn't feel preachy, and the romp still offers plenty for younger kids, who need not be thinking about such things yet.

Take, for instance, the expectations-defying way they use our old sloth friend in this go-round. I won't spoil the fun, but it's inventive.

And then there's another new ferociously friendly character, Nibbles Maplestick (a colorful Fortune Feimster), a busy beaver with a true-crime podcast who proves to be an ally to Judy and Nick, who helps them get in touch with the underground reptile world. En route, she introduces them to the wet-and-wild environment that's home to seals, sea lions and walruses. It's a blast.

As for the voice work as a whole, Goodwin ("Once Upon a Time") and Bateman ("Black Rabbit") deliver more fine work, effectively selling the emotional impact of the growing rift between Judy and Nick.

And, as you'd guess, Quan ("Everything Everywhere All at Once") infuses the venomous but otherwise harmless Gary with a specific brand of earnestness that only he can.

I wish the movie featured a bit more of the returning Elba ("Knuckles"), as the frustrated top-cop buffalo, and newcomer Patrick Warburton, who voices Brian Winddancer, a horse who's transitioned from acting to politics and continues to adore being in front of cameras as Zootopia's new mayor.

I guess Disney will just have to make a third "Zootopia" – not exactly something I thought I'd be rooting for before seeing the second.

MOVIE REVIEW

'Wake Up Dead Man' is the best 'Knives Out' mystery yet

By ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News (TNS)

'Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery'

Grade: B+

MPA rating: PG-13 (for violent content, bloody images, strong language, some crude sexual material, and smoking)

Running time: 2:24

How to watch: In theaters Nov. 26, on Netflix Dec. 12

Master detective Benoit Blanc is back for his most satisfying case yet in "Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery," the third film in the successful whodunit franchise, and Hollywood's best modern approximation of an old-school Agatha Christie murder mystery series. (And yes, that includes the ongoing Hercule Poirot films, an actual old-school Agatha Christie murder mystery series.)

This time Blanc (Daniel Craig, loose as a goose) is summoned to upstate New York, where Jefferson Wicks, a tyrannical monsignor at a small community church played with fiery aplomb by a scarily good Josh Brolin, has been stabbed and killed in his parish. But not right away: We spend plenty of time getting to know Wicks, the members of his congregation and new priest Jud Duplenticy (Josh O'Connor) before Wicks is struck down.

Jud is sent to the church from Albany after he calls on his fighting background and cold cocks a deacon. Not the best move for his career prospects. Jud is not a violent man per se, but Wicks sees him as an immediate threat, and he works to dominate him immediately, oversharing in confessions about his habit of self-pleasuring, sparing no detail.

Wicks oversees the church with an iron fist, challenging his congregation with hard-line, heated sermons that often turn personal. Only his most dedicated followers remain, including local doctor Nat Sharp (Jeremy Renner), borderline washed-up author Lee Ross (Andrew Scott), buttoned-up lawyer Vera Draven (Kerry Washington), former concert cellist Simone Vivane (Cailee Spaeny) and would-be politician Cy Draven (Daryl McCormack).

Glenn Close is Martha Delacroix, Wicks' dedicated assistant and the backbone of Our Lady of Perpetual Grace. Thomas Haden Church is the church's duty-bound groundskeeper, Samson Holt, who has long held Martha in the highest esteem.

We know as viewers that a murder is coming – it wouldn't be much of a "Knives Out" movie without one – and writer-director Rian Johnson has a ball putting all the pieces in place for this "perfectly impossible crime" to take place. The setup is excellent, and Johnson dresses up his world and his characters like his own personal chessboard.

Netflix / TNS

Josh O'Connor, left, and Daniel Craig in "Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery."

Where 2022's "Glass Onion" was a little too cheeky and self-referential for its own good, "Wake Up Dead Man" finds the perfect balance between murder mystery and post-modern riff on a murder mystery, to the point where it's not a deal breaker when town police chief Geraldine Scott (Mila Kunis) turns to Blanc and compares the goings on to a "Scooby Doo" case, and Blanc responds by giving his best "Scooby Dooby Doo!"

Johnson's script is tight and clever, and he allows "Challengers" breakout O'Connor to shine. O'Connor is the star of "Dead Man," working closely with both Brolin and Craig and carrying much of the movie on his shoulders. He is a smart, charismatic leading man, sincere and charming, and he finds the perfect tone for his character, somewhere between aw-shucks and determined. The guy's a star.

Everyone in this world is a suspect, of course – some more than others, frankly – but "Wake Up Dead Man" finds ways to cleverly invert the "Knives Out" formula without exhausting it. After "Glass Onion," it was looking like this franchise was close to hitting a wall of where it could go and how much it could sustain. But if "Wake Up Dead Man" is any indication, these movies could keep going on as long as Johnson wants to make them. Scooby Dooby Doo, indeed.

BOOKS

Why Sean Sherman's latest cookbook 'Turtle Island' is essential reading

By SHARYN JACKSON
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

When Sean Sherman holds his new book, "Turtle Island," he can feel the weight of it, both literally and symbolically.

The James Beard Award–winning chef behind Owamni, the Indigenous Food Lab and the nonprofit NATIFS has created what he calls an "essential" volume: a vast, 400-plus-page journey through North America's Indigenous foodways.

"It was a massive amount of work," Sherman said. And necessary, he added, "because the book just didn't exist before."

On the surface, "Turtle Island" is a cookbook. Look a little deeper and it doubles as a history textbook and even a travel guide, one Sherman and a team of writers and photographers spent three years building. "It feels like an encyclopedia," Sherman said.

The recipes, organized by regions such as the Great Plains, Great Lakes and Desert Lands, are touchpoints through North America's landscapes and seasons, offering culinary histories that often have been erased.

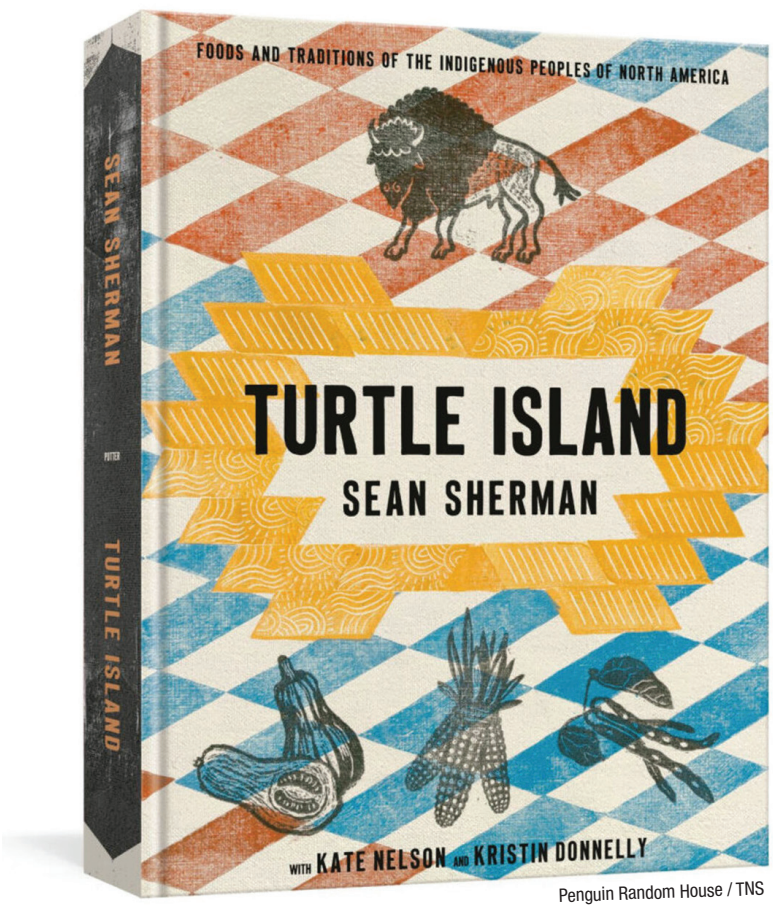
The title comes from a creation story that the world was formed on the back of a turtle, Sherman explained. "Turtle Island" spans 13 chapters – echoing the 13 segments of a turtle's shell and the 13 moons many tribes recognize in their calendars – and features contributions from collaborators Kate Nelson and Kristin Donnelly, with photography from Jaida Grey Eagle and David Alvarado.

"My hope is it just opens up people's minds a little bit, especially with what's going on in today's world with more things going backwards," Sherman said. "There's a lot of Black and Indigenous histories being removed and even demonized on top of that. It's really important to put these stories out there, because historically, we have been invisible."

For Sherman, who grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, the book expands his mission to illuminate Indigenous food systems and history, and to reframe how people see North America.

"The purpose wasn't to be like a museum piece," he said. "The purpose was really about the future."

Sherman spoke with the Star Tribune about the process behind "Turtle Island," the regions it explores, and why it belongs on North American bookshelves. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.


FOODS AND TRADITIONS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF NORTH AMERICA
SEAN SHERMAN
TURTLE ISLAND
SEAN SHERMAN
TURTLE ISLAND
WITH KATE NELSON AND KRISTIN DONNELLY
Penguin Random House / TNS

What did you want "Turtle Island" to illuminate that other works have overlooked?

The purpose was to try to shed some light on the immense amount of diversity that's always been invisible, and just to showcase how much there is to think about and to consider and to be aware of, no matter where you are in North America, and even beyond that.

The Great Plains section is especially personal for you. How did you go about researching the other regions across North America?

I had already traveled and made many connections all over the place. Some were memories of what I've done in the past decade-plus, since I've opened up the Sioux Chef [his Indigenous foods company rooted in tribal and wild-sourced ingredients]. I've been able to visit and work with and travel to so many places across Mexico and the U.S. and Alaska and parts of Canada.

But also just having the team, especially Kate Nelson, who used her journalistic approach – we'd talk about who to talk to, the memories, and she would follow up and really connect with people and pull stories out of them. I didn't want to come across as mansplaining everything from a [single] perspective. I wanted it to be very open for people to be talking about the uniqueness of those regions and tribes and some of the things that are deeply connected out there. So it was very considerate and intentional, the way we pulled the storytelling together.

And Kristin [Donnelly], the other co-author, was somebody who had the ability to manage something so complex and so large and help us pull it together.

What did you encounter in the research that surprised you?

There's quite a bit. We weren't writing a book on tradition, so we weren't trying to just highlight every traditional recipe. It was really about imagining what's possible and using that philosophy and challenge that I created so long ago – cutting away colonial ingredients and using only Indigenous pieces and creating all these recipes with just those ingredients of those distinct regions.

It could be really challenging to go backwards, especially places like Yucatán in Mexico. It wasn't trying to completely reframe what Mexican food was, but just kind of put it through this challenge of what's possible by creating recipes using only Indigenous ingredients to those regions, with consideration of the Indigenous knowledge keepers and peoples that are still down there.

You've shared parts of your story before. Did this feel different?

I get centered a lot. Of course, it's because I've become the face of what we do with all of our organizations. But I wanted to write out for myself just what my experience was, of how I got to where I am, and share those stories. I'm happy to use this attention to help propel us forward. But I wanted to share all of these amazing, diverse perspectives that live out there, too.

You hinted there might be more volumes to come, even focusing on other continents.

I think it kind of would have to be, because we had to just barely scratch the surface. There was no way we could talk about every tribe, every food piece. We had to be very selective. It's already a massive book – we turned in over 220,000 words with the manuscript. But there's plenty of opportunity to do more volumes. I think it definitely set the tone of what's possible.

It does give off that feeling that this is something you want to own, a keepsake.

We've been doing a lot of interviews leading up to it and one word that keeps coming through is "essential." That's a big word for something like a cookbook.

What are you hoping readers, who didn't grow up with the concept of Turtle Island and the harmony and balance found in Indigenous foods, will take away from this book?

I just hope that people can look at North America through a different lens. We were able to weave in a lot of historical references and talk about really difficult things throughout this cookbook, and I think it's really important for people just to be curious. Food is a massively important language that we all share. So I hope this book can open people's minds – to see this wonderful, diverse foundation of North America, and how there's so much to learn. It's this exercise in wiping away colonial borders and looking at North America as a whole, but still celebrating so much diverse tapestry of culture and culinary flavors.

What are some recipes that stand out for you?

The one that I really liked was from my own region – the wahánpi, which just means soup in Lakota. It's got dried bison meat and dried thínpsinla (prairie turnips) that were reconstituted, and prairie onions. It was so simple, but to me, it just tasted like home, and it felt like it ignited something.

Some of these recipes will be comforting recipes, some of these will be very odd to people, and some of these recipes you might not ever be able to replicate. The publisher was fine with that. We don't have to have everything at our will, or at our local Whole Foods. Of course we offer some suggestions, but some of these you might not even have the chance to attempt to try unless you're in the right region around the right people at the right season.

So it's a cookbook that doesn't need to be cooked through.

It doesn't have to be. That was kind of the purpose. I feel like the majority of the people who have the book will maybe, if they're traveling to a different region of the United States, want to reference it to learn more about that particular region. Like if they're going out to Alaska or are visiting Mexico again and just looking at it from a different perspective. I feel like the book will come in very handy in those instances.

What makes you most proud of "Turtle Island"?

It just felt like such an important piece to put out. And I was so excited for the entire team. Everybody played off each other's strengths so perfectly. The photography team was amazing. Even my partner, Mecca Bos, did a lot of the recipe testing. All this crazy stuff was coming into our house throughout the last couple of years, just trying to test everything out. Like, where am I going to find some beaver? Where am I going to get some moose? Where am I going to get some javelina? I helped her find it. There's a lot of energy behind building it and I'm just excited.

More information

"Turtle Island: Foods and Traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of North America" by Sean Sherman with Kate Nelson and Kristin Donnelly (Clarkson Potter, $45) was released Nov. 11. It's widely available in bookstores and online at seansherman.com.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Nov. 15, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. The Strength of the Few. James Islington. Saga
2. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
3. Exit Strategy. Child/Child. Bantam
4. Nash Falls. David Baldacci. Grand Central
5. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
6. The Secret of Secrets. Dan Brown. Doubleday
7. Remain. Sparks/Shyamalan. Random House
8. Always Remember. Charlie Mackesy. Penguin Life
9. Gone Before Goodbye. Witherspoon/Coben. Grand Central
10. The King's Ransom. Janet Evanovich. Atria

Hardcover nonfiction

1. The Let Them Theory. Mel Robbins. Hay House
2. The Look. Michelle Obama. Crown
3. The Pioneer Woman Cooks: The Essential Recipes. Ree Drummond. Morrow
4. How to Test Negative for Stupid. John Kennedy. Broadside
5. Nobody's Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
6. Something from Nothing. Alison Roman. Clarkson Potter
7. 1929. Andrew Ross Sorkin. Viking
8. The American Revolution. Ward/Burns. Knopf
9. Notes on Being a Man. Scott Galloway. Simon & Schuster
10. The Promise of Heaven. David Jeremiah. Thomas Nelson

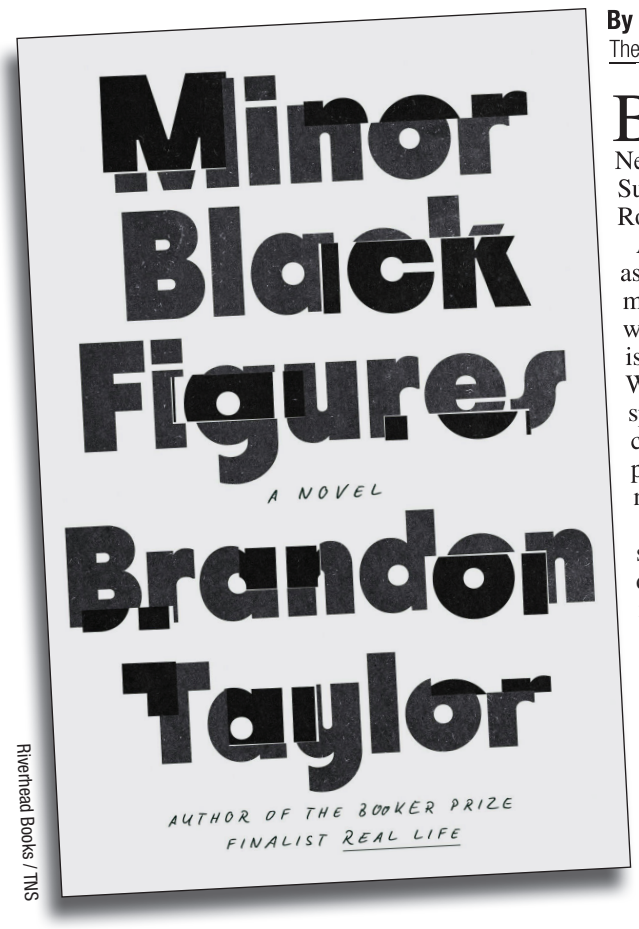
Trade paperback

1. Murder at Holly House. Denzil Meyrick. Poisoned Pen
2. Between Two Kings. Lindsay Straube. Bloom
3. The 2026 Old Farmer's Almanac. Old Farmer's Almanac
4. The God of the Woods. Liz Moore. Riverhead
5. Your Knife, My Heart. K.M. Moronova. Bloom
6. Merry Christmas, You Filthy Animal. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
7. Good Spirits. B.K. Borison. Avon
8. Leather & Lark. Brynne Weaver. Slowburn
9. Mate. Ali Hazelwood. Berkley
10. The Gingerbread Bakery. Laurie Gilmore. HarperCollins

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

An artist and his would-be boyfriend are 'Minor Black Figures'



Riverhead Books / TNS

By MICHAEL KLEBER-DIGGS
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Brandon Taylor's fourth book, "Minor Black Figures," begins in New York City in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade.

As political and societal tides shift, as the city rises up in agitation, we meet Wyeth, a Black, millennial artist who hasn't made art in a while and is struggling with what to paint next. We first find him downtown, in studio space he shares with four other artists, considering whether and how to paint photos he took at recent protests but not finding any inspiration.

Soon, Wyeth meets Keating, a handsome odd-jobber, busy in the city doing a "little of this, little of that," mostly construction work. Wyeth and Keating flirt, share cigarettes, then a bed. Eventually, after fits and starts, they begin a thoroughly modern relationship. In other words, it's complicated.

Wyeth makes an engaging and almost completely likable protagonist. He's observant, witty, smart, educated – although traumatized by his MFA years – introspective and self-conscious. Extremely self conscious. Interactions that many might consider casual take on abundant weight for him; small slights that could slide right off his back, linger and fester.

Through Taylor's intense gaze and practiced hand, Wyeth is both a fully realized individual and a realistic representation of millennial angst, of how hard it is for that generation to find meaning and purpose in life after formative years disrupted by 9/11, recession and a global pandemic.

Wyeth navigates New York with an artist's attention, and Taylor writes the city in dazzling, poetic prose. Wyeth is surrounded by cool, cynical artists, most of whom try to persuade him to do whatever he wants with his art. But, because the big questions he needs to resolve in order to return to the canvas are presented by Taylor with depth and breadth, then rendered with sincerity and seriousness, it is easy to understand why doing whatever he wants isn't so easy.

In one scene, Wyeth views a video of a food delivery worker wading through chest-high flood waters with someone's dinner held above his head, trying to keep it dry. Wyeth wonders if the man is admirable for his efforts or desperate. Are the risks he's taking not a big deal or a sign of societal collapse? Should the man be more interested in self-preservation or is making the delivery an act of self-preservation?

Wyeth also wrestles with confounding questions more specific to him, questions about his artistic identity and Black identity, about making art for the culture without it being commodified and cheapened as a result.

"How to paint life as a black person, with black people, not black figures, people, and not have. . . all the stuff attached." As they get to know each other, Wyeth learns that Keating is grappling with big questions too, questions about faith and his relationship with God.

Taylor writes "Minor Black Figures" with subtlety and sophistication. He weaves in insights about modern art, classic art, Criterion Collection cinema classics and classical music, all like it's no big deal – although considerable care is evident in his craftsmanship.

Like a Bergman film, quiet tension builds throughout but never shouts. I found myself in thrall to questions too: Will Wyeth find a way forward with his art? With Keating? Will Keating find his faith again? And what about the country where all this is set, what will happen to it? Taylor is terrific and "Minor Black Figures" is a major accomplishment.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

Charger unplugged! Dodge Sixpack muscle car is large and in charge

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

The 2026 Dodge Charger Sixpack is built on the same, flexible STLA Large platform as the electric Charger Daytona.

In the early morning light, I rotated my gorgeous red 2026 Dodge Charger Sixpack Scat Pack onto empty Huron River Drive. I floored the throttle and awakened the beast. WAAUUUUUGHH! All four paws translated 531 pounds of torque to the asphalt and I exploded toward the twisties – my fingers rifling through the gears with steering-mounting paddle shifters. WHAP! WHAP!

The Dodge Charger is back, unplugged and untethered.

After three dark years in the government woodshed, Dodge has restocked its stable with an earth-pawing, gas-fed pony car next to the electric Charger Daytona. The Daytona was an answer to a question customers weren't asking: what if we made the best-selling V-8 muscle car electric? Dodge sales fell off a cliff.

If the four-cylinder Ford Mustang II was the symbol of 1970s "Malaise Era" regulatory excess, then the charged Charger is the symbol of the 2020s' forced electric-vehicle push. It makes artificial V-8 sounds. It's heavier than the Titanic. It jumped the shark.

But in reducing Stellantis NV's exposure to government emissions fines, it served its purpose and helped rebirth the gas-powered Charger. The legendary Hemi V-8 is coming, but first: the 3.0-liter, 550-horse twin-turbocharged inline-6 cylinder Hurricane Sixpack. Sixpack as in the gateway drug to the hard stuff.

It ain't too shabby.

I hammered the Charger Sixpack and Daytona EV Scat Packs across Washtenaw County's rural roads. Based on a flexible chassis that can house gas and electric powertrains, the hatchback (more on that feature later) Chargers are beautiful to look at with their throwback, 1968-era fascias, Coke-bottle bods and digital interiors.

The Sixpack is six times better. The driving experience is more visceral, more alive, more genuine. Push the START button next to the naughty pistol-grip shifter and Sixpack growls menacingly. Start the Daytona EV and it roars to life. An electric roar? The sound is synthetic and its obnoxious volume only calls more attention to the forgery.

There's nothing fake about the Daytona's electric power, though. With a stump-pulling 623-pound feet of torque, the e-Charger slammed me into the back of the seat as I nailed it onto I-94. BRAWWWWWRRH! went the fake V-8 sound as I eclipsed (number withheld to preserve my license) mph.

But at 4,815 pounds, Sixpack weighs 20 percent less than Daytona, making it a lot more playful around the cloverleaf that prefaces the rocket launch into the four-lane. That lesser girth also means that, despite giving up 120 ponies to the 670-horse Charger Daytona, the Sixpack sports the same 1:8.7 power-to-weight ratio.

With 100 percent of torque available at launch, Daytona out-drags the Sixpack to 60 mph (3.3 seconds to 3.9), but the gas-guzzler is more fun everywhere else.

On an empty Huron Drive, I initiated launch control in the Sixpack by burying the brake pedal, then the accelerator. RPMs spiked to 3,000 and held – RRRRRGGGGH – as I kept both feet in it.

Release the brake. Release the Kraken.

Like the EV, Sixpack comes standard with all-wheel drive to better harness the enormous power coming through its driveshafts. The Charger slewed right briefly on the cold morning asphalt before all four tires hooked up, launching me into fall splendor.

Sixpack offers $4,995 Customer Preferred Pack 22B, which includes goodies like wireless charging pad, ambient lighting, head-up display, auto windshield wipers, eight-way power seats, 360-degree camera, and a partridge in a pear tree.

Get it for the head-up display. It's awesome.

I pulled the downshift paddle and automatically engaged the eight-speed tranny's MANUAL mode. WHAP! In fourth gear, I entered a tricky right-left uphill complex. The horizontal tachometer in the head-up display was in my direct line of sight. 3,000 RPM. WHAP! I pulled the paddle again into 3rd gear and the engine screamed at 5,000 RPM.

I tore though the twisties, then upshifted to 4th at 6,000 RPM – the gear indicator right there in the head-up display – on my way to the moon.

That's visceral fun the EV can't provide. Good as the Sixpack was, I still dreamed of what the new Charger would feel like with a good ol' Scat Pack V-8 at the other end of my lead foot.

"Have you looked at the new Charger Sixpack?" I asked a friend who owns a V8-powered, 2022 Charger Scat Pack.

"Yeah, it's good looking," he replied.

"Going to get one?"

"I'll wait for the V-8."

I get it. And when the V-8 comes, it will benefit from the same major chassis upgrades that make Sixpack a joy. When last-gen Charger (and its Challenger coupe stablemate) exited the market in 2023, they took with them an aging, rear-wheel-drive platform that could barely contain its Godzilla drivetrains.

Three years on and the new, all-wheel-drive STLA Large Platform is 25 percent stiffer. This is still a big car – gaining six inches in length and two inches of width over last gen. Add AWD, hatchback and more legroom and SixPack is a significant 500 pounds heavier than its predecessor. And that's BEFORE you put a V-8 boat anchor up front.

The upgrades are all worth it.

I've touched on the benefits of a stiffer platform and AWD to keep this rocket on the road. But when you're not setting fire to asphalt like a 4,800-pound Road Runner cartoon, you'll find the car's newfound utility commendable.

Readers of this column know I'm a missionary for hot hatches like the VW Golf GTI, Golf R, Mazda3 Turbo and Honda Civic Type R as the market's best all-around value: fun, utilitarian, affordable. The Charger Sixpack is the world's biggest hot hatch.

And relatively affordable. At $56,990, my tester was $10K cheaper than a comparably-equipped, inline-6-powered, $67K BMW 540i xDrive (not to mention the $64K Charger Daytona EV) while offering better looks, utility, rear legroom and speed.

Open the rear deck and Charger will swallow a cart-full of luggage. Flatten the rear seats and add bicycles to your cargo. It's a taaaall hatch but Dodge has thoughtfully put the automatic OPEN/CLOSE button on the left rear of the trunk for easy access.

The four-door model will be preferred by most Charger customers, but the rear seats of the coupe model I tested are plenty big too – unlike, say, Mustang rear seats that require removal of your legs. Rear passengers will also benefit from the $995 panoramic roof option.

Cockpit ergonomics are typically superb for a Dodge product, with raised buttons on the steering wheel for adaptive cruise control, buttons on the back for volume/station changes. Drive modes hang below the left spoke so your hands never need leave the wheel.

So when you come up on a 375-horse BMW 540i on a cloverleaf, you can toggle SPORT mode and drag him off the exit.

As you blow by, be sure and shout: "The Charger is back, baby!"

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Dodge Charger

★★★★

Vehicle type: All-wheel-drive, five-passenger coupe and sedan

Price: Base $51,990, including $1,995 destination charge. Sedan an extra $2,000. $67,360 Scat Plus coupe with Customer Preferred Package as tested

Powerplant: 3.0-liter, twin-turbo inline-6 cylinder

Power: 420 horsepower, 468 pound-feet torque (R/T); 550 horsepower, 531 pound-feet torque (Scat Pack)

Transmission: Eight-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 3.9 seconds (Scat Pack, mfr.); top speed, 177 mph (Scat Pack)

Weight: 4,815 pounds

Range: EPA est. mpg, 16 city/26 highway/20 combined (Scat Pack); 91 octane fuel required

Report card

Highs: Gorgeous hot hatch; AWD/head-up display/hatchback goodies

Lows: Gets pricey; no V-8 yet

Affordable Italian glamour: the 2026 Alfa Romeo Tonale

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

In a building at Alfa Romeo's test track in Balocco, Italy, there's a hallway lined with photographs of impossibly glamorous people driving impossibly glamorous cars. They're the sort of images that make you want to light a cigarette and say something dramatic in Italian, even if you don't speak a word of it. It's from a time when being rich meant you had style and taste, rather than a personal assistant and a gluten allergy.

But then you meet the 2026 Alfa Romeo Tonale. Clearly, this vehicle is not Sophia Loren or Marcello Mastroianni in sunglasses. This is a sensible latte in a recyclable cup. It's a compact crossover that represents the dull practicality modern motorists claim to need, even though most of them will never use it for anything more daring than a run to Walmart.

When introduced two years ago, Alfa Romeo was counting on the Tonale compact luxury SUV to charm America like an Italian waiter with good hair. And to be fair, it's still Alfa's best-seller here. But even so, its sales nosedived 23 percent this year to a mere 2,109 cars. That's fewer Alfas than there are people named José in Miami.

Why? Because underneath all that Italian flair, the Tonale shares its mechanical underpants with the Dodge Hornet. Same platform, same oily bits, both built in Italy. But one of these cars is the embodiment of a wink and a cigarette, and the other wears a bee on the badge and possesses rental-car odor. Sure, the Hornet's cheaper. But that hasn't helped. Its sales imploded this year as well, by 46 percent. Turns out no one wants a Dodge that is, in reality, an Alfa Romeo in the witness protection program. Imagine that.

But rather than sitting around drinking grappa and gesturing wildly, Alfa is revamping its entry-level love. Gone is the Tonale Plug-In Hybrid, the one that made you feel smug about the planet while you charged it next to your lawnmower. In its place is a proper 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine with 268 horsepower, a nine-speed automatic and all-wheel drive. And for 2026, there'll be no Hornet at all. Tariffs will see to that. Who knew that they actually do some good?

For the Tonale looks Italian in the best possible way. It's beautifully proportioned and blessed with Alfa's iconic triangular grille and 3+3 LED headlights, a nod to the old Alfa SZ, to cars. Its 2026 facelift looks somewhat meaner, but remains handsome and confident. You can have wheels up to 20 inches, because of course you can. This is Italy, where restraint is a foreign concept.

Inside, the top Veloce trim is part car, part cathedral to Alcantara. The seats hug you like an overenthusiastic gondolier. There's sufficient space up front, and as much rear seat legroom as the larger Stelvio, albeit with slightly less headroom. The steering wheel feels like it costs more than an entire Dodge, and the dashboard is covered in screens, stitching and optimism. There's a 12.3-inch digital gauge cluster, a 10.25-inch infotainment screen that runs TomTom navigation last updated when "Friends" was still in prime time, and a Harman Kardon stereo that could wake the dead.

And if you need to charge your phone, you'll find more USB ports than a Starbucks. Under the bonnet, the Tonale runs 0-to-60 mph in 6.5 seconds. Top speed is 140 mph, assuming you find a bit of road and some courage. In its Natural driving mode, it's eager and alive, like an Alfa should be. It's twitchy, a little bonkers, and delightfully fun. Flick it into Dynamic mode and it's as if the car's just been injected with a triple espresso. The throttle sharpens, the gearbox wakes up, and suddenly you're thinking you're a better driver than you actually are.

Stellantis / TNS

Push it, and the rear end dances, not dangerously, but joyfully, like an excitable puppy that's found a tennis ball. The steering actually talks to you, which is more than you can say for most modern cars. It rides better than you'd expect too, soaking up bumps while still feeling alive. It's civilized, but not too civilized. You never forget it's Italian.

The Tonale isn't perfect. It's not even properly Alfa, if we're being honest. But it has that unmistakable Italian je ne sais quoi. There's a bit of drama, a bit of nonsense, and just enough passion to make you forgive its flaws. No, it won't make you feel like you're sipping espresso at a villa in Lake Como. But with a price starting at $36,535, it will make you feel like you've bought an affordable slice of Italian motoring. And these days, that's about as glamorous as motoring gets.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Alfa Romeo Tonale

Base price: $36,535

Engine: Turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder

Horsepower/Torque: 268/295 pound-feet

EPA rating (combined): 24 mpg (Estimated)

Fuel required: Premium

Length/Width/Height: 178/6 3/8 2 inches

Ground clearance: 6.1 inches

Payload: 1,345 pounds

Cargo capacity: 27-55 cubic feet

Towing capacity: 3,307 pounds

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Solar speaker looks and sounds good

A category on the Victrola site referred perfectly to their new Victrola Zen wireless outdoor Bluetooth solar speaker as "The Art of Outdoor Listening." This speaker not only has powerful, crystal-clear sound but also a beautifully designed piece of art that delivers all-day, solar-powered playback.
Victrola / TNS

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

A category on the Victrola site referred perfectly to their new **Victrola Zen wireless outdoor Bluetooth solar speaker** as "The Art of Outdoor Listening." This speaker not only has powerful, crystal-clear sound but also is a beautifully designed piece of art that delivers all-day, solar-powered playback.

The somewhat rounded, stone-colored speaker (12.71 by 12.76 by 10.63 inches) is designed to blend naturally into an outdoor environment. A flat bottom keeps it in place, and a solar panel on top ensures there's always power. All this is designed with an IP65 weather-resistant body.

A metal grill is on the front cover of the speaker, which produces up to 22 watts of output. Rubber control buttons are on the opposite side of the grill. There, you find the power, Bluetooth pairing and a button for Auracast multi-speaker connections. All the buttons have corresponding LED indicator lights. There is a rubber flap cover over the USB-C port that must be closed to keep the speaker weather-resistant.

If you're not familiar with Auracast technology, it's simple and easy to use. After pairing one of the speakers (now your host speaker) with your music source (smartphone, iPad, etc.) via Bluetooth (v5.4), you can pair and sync an unlimited number of Auracast-enabled speakers with the press of a button. It's instant and easy.

Every time your host speaker is on and paired, Wireless Wake Mode turns on the speakers you previously connected via Auracast. The previously last used modes, pairings and connections remain in its memory. Victrola points out that Auracast technology provides enhanced audio quality, extended range and improved battery performance.

With its rugged design, one advantage of the speakers is that they can be placed most anywhere: on a patio, under a stable, or, as I chose for testing, buried to blend in with my landscape. The speakers performed flawlessly, with sound that was clear, crisp, and powerful, and a nice amount of bass. I had two speakers for my testing, and they paired without issue and played for an entire day.

There is a 2,450 mAh lithium-ion USB-C battery inside that charges in less than 5 hours. It's rated to play for up to 30 hours at 50 percent volume and 10 hours at 100 percent volume. But then, when you add the solar panels, which need sunlight, your time will only be extended.

The outdoor features will keep the speaker operating in a temperature range of 32 to 113 degrees Fahrenheit. And while they are great for the outdoors, don't hesitate to pick them up (each weighs 8.17 pounds) and bring the great sound indoors.

Even before the Victrola Zen was available, it had a head start after being named a winner in this year's Consumer Electronics Show Picks Awards in the Twice category. The category honors products that are at the forefront of innovation, showcasing products and solutions that push boundaries.

https://www.victrola.com/collections/bluetooth-speakers/products/zen-outdoor-solar-speaker. $299.99

I'll sum it up right away: The pocket-sized **TicNote AI voice recorder** from Mobvoi is a fantastic device. There's no doubt a device like this will increase productivity and be a significant advantage when traveling abroad.

It's touted on their website as the world's first Agentic AI Notetaker, designed to help anyone increase their productivity with a wide variety of uses. The all-in-one device can mind map, record, real-time transcribe, translate and summarize meetings, phone calls, and lectures.

When I was first pitched to take a look at the TicNote, a note in the email caught my attention. They stated it has technology that can pair with your phone or be used on its own to capture thoughts you didn't even realize were mixed within a phone call or meeting, thanks to Shadow, a built-in AI agent. I know AI is a fast-developing technology with no end in sight, and this really takes things to another level.

The pocket-sized TicNote AI voice recorder from Mobvoi is a fantastic device. There's no doubt a device like this will increase productivity and be a significant advantage when traveling abroad.
Mobvoi / TNS

The Shadow feature is an organizer that can recap a meeting and even turn that or any recording into a Podcast. It takes productivity to another level by organizing and connecting recordings taken over time. With the help of AI, the built-in Shadow assistant transcribes audio in over 100 languages in real time.

It is built with noise-canceling microphones to make your recordings clean and background noise-free, even from several feet away. You can carry the TicNote, which is about the size of 3 or 4 credit cards stacked together, on its own, or use the included MagSafe case to attach it to a MagSafe-compatible smartphone, which is ideal for cell phone recording. A vibration sensor records both sides of phone calls in clarity, directly from your device.

A power button turns it on and off, and a display shows a few of the features. A small toggle switch on the front is used to choose between recording phone calls and in-person voice recordings. The internal battery lasts 22 hours before a charge is needed with the proprietary USB cable. Files can be transferred wirelessly from TicNote to work with the companion app.

It stores up to 25 hours of recordings in its 64GB of built-in storage. There are three monthly plans available to increase the storage and a variety of other features. A chart on the TicNote site highlights them all.

Some highlights include the free Plus plan, which offers 600 monthly transcription minutes and up to 10 conversations per day. The Pro plan ($12.99 monthly/$79 yearly) has 2,100 monthly transcription minutes and unlimited daily conversations. The business plan ($29.99 monthly/$239 yearly) includes 6,600 monthly transcription minutes and unlimited daily conversations.

https://ticnote.ai/products/ai-voice-recorder-us. $159.99

Whoosh is the one thing that matters for any gadget, computer, vehicle, display TV, or smartphone with a screen – and especially touchscreens.

The award-winning, non-toxic, and eco-friendly, fingerprint-resistant screen cleaner will leave any or all of these devices clean and clear. Just spray on a small amount of the fine mist, and with the included scratch-free soft microfiber cloth, you'll be left with a clean odor-free screen.

Whoosh is available in a variety of sizes. A pair of 1-ounce bottles with two microfiber cloths is $17.99. A container of 90 wipes is $19.99. By the end of this year, every bottle of Whoosh will be recyclable, and most will be made from 100 percent recycled plastic. And their Wipes will be biodegradable.

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Whoosh / TNS

Whoosh and its Wipes are environmentally friendly.

Whoosh also has a full line of cleaning products for your home, including wipes, sprays, and cleaning cloths.

https://whoosh.com

Contact Gregg Ellman at gregg ellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

New Wi-Fi? Better let Alexa know

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This week we help my mom.

She did some research and found out she could save $70 per month if she changed her TV and Internet service over to her local cable company.

She made the change, and the installer came last week to set it all up, which went off without a problem.

He set up her TVs and iPad and iPhone on the new wireless network, but she still needs to change the network information for her smart home devices like her Amazon Echoes.

To change the Wi-Fi network on the Alexa devices, she needs to open the Alexa app on her phone or tablet. She'll need to be joined to the new Wi-Fi network.

I would have hoped there was an overall Wi-Fi network setting, but to change the network, she'll change each Echo device separately.

Because you've changed your Wi-Fi equipment with a different network name, none of your smart home devices are connected, so you'll need to touch each one to do the network setup again.

To make the change, tap on Devices at the bottom of the screen and select your Echo from the list and then tap the Settings gear icon from the upper right corner.

Tap on Change Wi-Fi network.

Now, on the Alexa, hold down the Action button (the round button) for about 15 seconds until the light turns orange and Alexa announces it's in setup mode.

Back in the app, you should see your new Wi-Fi network listed. Touch it and enter your new Wi-Fi password and tap Connect.

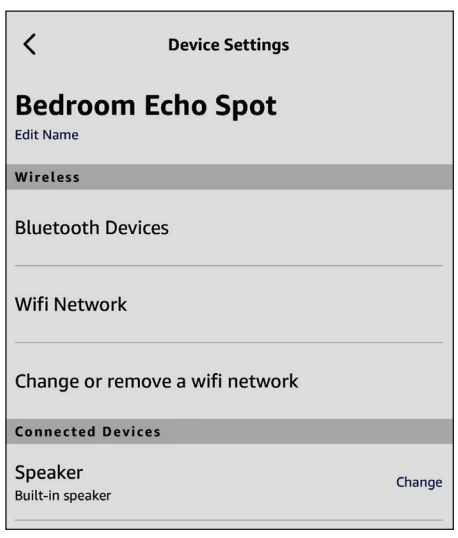
Wait for a few seconds for the Echo to join the new network and then give it a try.

My default test of Alexa's network connectivity is to ask her the current temperature.

Because you must press the reset button to get the Echo back into pairing mode, Mom will need to do this for both of her Alexa devices.

Mom will also need to make similar changes to her Wyze cameras. The process for those is to reset them and add them back to the Wyze app with the new network settings.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossman techadviser@gmail.com.



Jim Rossman / TNS

Alexa Wi-Fi settings.

Learning with AI falls short compared to old-fashioned web search

By SHIRI MELUMAD
University of Pennsylvania (The Conversation)

Since the release of ChatGPT in late 2022, millions of people have started using large language models to access knowledge. And it's easy to understand their appeal: Ask a question, get a polished synthesis and move on – it feels like effortless learning.

However, a new paper I co-authored offers experimental evidence that this ease may come at a cost: When people rely on large language models to summarize information on a topic for them, they tend to develop shallower knowledge about it compared to learning through a standard Google search.

Co-author Jin Ho Yun and I, both professors of marketing, reported this finding in a paper based on seven studies with more than 10,000 participants. Most of the studies used the same basic paradigm: Participants were asked to learn about a topic – such as how to grow a vegetable garden – and were randomly assigned to do so by using either an LLM like ChatGPT or the "old-fashioned way," by navigating links using a standard Google search.

No restrictions were put on how they used the tools; they could search on Google as long as they wanted and could continue to prompt ChatGPT if they felt they wanted more information. Once they completed their research, they were then asked to write advice to a friend on the topic based on what they learned.

The data revealed a consistent pattern: People who learned about a topic through an LLM versus web search felt that they learned less, invested less effort in subsequently writing their advice, and ultimately wrote advice that was shorter, less factual and more generic. In turn, when this advice was presented to an independent sample of readers, who were unaware of which tool had been used to learn about the topic, they found the advice to be less informative, less helpful, and they were less likely to adopt it.

We found these differences to be robust across a variety of contexts. For example, one possible reason LLM users wrote briefer and more generic advice is simply that the LLM results exposed users to less eclectic information than the Google results. To control for this possibility, we conducted an experiment where participants were exposed to an identical set of facts in the results of their Google and ChatGPT searches. Likewise, in another experiment we held constant the search platform – Google – and varied whether participants learned from standard Google results or Google's AI Overview feature.

The findings confirmed that, even when holding the facts and platform constant, learning from synthesized LLM responses led to shallower knowledge compared to gathering, interpreting and synthesizing information for oneself via standard web links.

Why it matters

Why did the use of LLMs appear to diminish learning? One of the most fundamental principles of skill development is that people learn best when they are actively engaged with the material they are trying to learn.

When we learn about a topic through Google search, we face much more "friction": We must navigate different web links, read informational sources, and interpret and synthesize them ourselves.

While more challenging, this friction leads to the development of a deeper, more original mental representation of the topic at hand. But with LLMs, this entire process is done on the user's behalf, transforming learning from a more active to passive process.

What's next?

To be clear, we do not believe the solution to these issues is to avoid using LLMs, especially given the undeniable benefits they offer in many contexts. Rather, our message is that people simply need to become smarter or more strategic users of LLMs – which starts by understanding the domains wherein LLMs are beneficial versus harmful to their goals.

Need a quick, factual answer to a question? Feel free to use your favorite AI co-pilot. But if your aim is to develop deep and generalizable knowledge in an area, relying on LLM syntheses alone will be less helpful.

As part of my research on the psychology of new technology and new media, I am also interested in whether it's possible to make LLM learning a more active process. In another experiment we tested this by having participants engage with a specialized GPT model that offered real-time web links alongside its synthesized responses. There, however, we found that once participants received an LLM summary, they weren't motivated to dig deeper into the original sources. The result was that the participants still developed shallower knowledge compared to those who used standard Google.

Building on this, in my future research I plan to study generative AI tools that impose healthy frictions for learning tasks – specifically, examining which types of guardrails or speed bumps most successfully motivate users to actively learn more beyond easy, synthesized answers. Such tools would seem particularly critical in secondary education, where a major challenge for educators is how best to equip students to develop foundational reading, writing and math skills while also preparing for a real world where LLMs are likely to be an integral part of their daily lives.

The Research Brief is a short take on interesting academic work.

Shiri Melumad is an associate professor of marketing at the University of Pennsylvania.

TRAVEL

Visitors to Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky tour the cavern, which is the world's longest cave system, on Sept. 29, 2024.
Becca Milfeld / AFP / Getty Images / TNS

Picturesque UNESCO World Heritage sites in the U.S.

By NOREEN KOMPANIK
TravelPulse (TNS)

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is selected for places that possess outstanding universal value for humanity in terms or cultural, historical, scientific or natural significance. They are also designated for protection and preservation under international treaties.

As of October 2025, a total of 1,248 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are located across 170 countries. Some of the most popular and well-known include the Great Barrier Reef, Pyramids of Egypt and the Taj Mahal.

The U.S. boasts 26 sites, some whose beauty and majesty are awe-inspiring and incredibly picturesque. Here are some of our favorites.

Everglades National Park

These fascinating and vast flat wetlands in southern Florida represent one of the most unique and ecologically important parks in the U.S. Covering almost 1.5 million acres, the area's habitats include three different colored mangrove forests, tropical hardwood hammocks, pine rocklands, fresh and saltwater marshes and seagrass beds.

The area is also home to the manatee, Florida panther, great egret, Roseate Spoonbills, and alligator and crocodile (one of the only places in the world where both exist). The best way to explore the region is by airboat rides, popular just outside the national park boundaries.

Glacier Bay

This natural park and preserve is one of Alaska's most spectacular natural treasures comprised of glaciers, fjords, mountains and wildlife. The area was shaped by eons of glacial and continuous tectonic activity and is known for its dramatic calving (huge pieces of ice falling into the sea).

Located near Juneau, Glacier Bay measures almost 3.3 million acres and is part of the Glacier Bay–Wrangell–St. Elias–Kluane–Tatshenshini-Alsek World Heritage Site – the world's largest non-polar ice field and one of the largest protected wilderness areas on the planet.

Glacier National Park

Part of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park that includes Waterton in Canada and Glacier National Park in Montana, the U.S. site is defined by its dramatic Rocky Mountain scenery, glacially carved valleys and crystal-clear alpine lakes.

The famous Continental Divide runs right through the park, splitting waters that flow to the Pacific from those flowing to the Atlantic. Mountain peaks exceed 10,000 feet, and common wildlife include Grizzly bears, black bears, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, moose, elk, wolverines, lynx and over 270 bird species.

Grand Canyon

The famous Grand Canyon in Arizona was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 and is known for its breathtaking vistas and geological significance. Carved out by the Colorado River, The Grand Canyon's layers can be traced back nearly two billion years.

As one of the most iconic natural wonders in the U.S., the Grand Canyon attracts millions of visitors each year who come to hike its scenic rim trails, raft the rushing Colorado River, explore its ecosystems, or simply take in the sweeping views.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

There's a reason this area is known as the Great Smokies given the natural blue-gray mist that hangs over the mountains and valleys giving them a smoky appearance. The Native American Cherokee named the region 'Shaconage', meaning 'Place of the Blue Smoke.'

One of the most visited national parks in the U.S., it straddles the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, in the heart of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The Great Smokies feature steep picturesque valleys, stunning waterfalls, rolling ridges, and peaks above 6,000 feet including Clingman's Dome, the park's highest.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Located on the Big Island of Hawaii, the park, extending from sea level to 13,680 feet includes the summits of two of the world's most active volcanoes, Mauna Loa and Kilauea.

The park is roughly 335,000 acres, though is constantly expanding due to new land formed by Kilauea's lava flows. The Halema'uma'u Crater, within the Kilauea's summit caldera, is a sacred site in Hawaiian tradition – believed to be the home of Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes. Visitors can witness fresh lava flows, craters, steam vents, lava tubes and cooled lava fields.

Mammoth Cave National Park

The longest cave system in the world is located in central Kentucky and features 426 miles of mapped passageways that are still growing as new sections are explored. The cave was carved out of Mississippian limestone by the Green River and its tributaries over millions of years.

This underground system includes vast chambers, tight crawl spaces, underground rivers and striking geological formations like stalactites, stalagmites and gypsum flowers. Easy walks to more intensive wild cave spelunking tours are available for advance booking.

Mesa Verde

The Mesa Verde plateau in southwestern Colorado is one of the most remarkable archeological preserves in the U.S., once occupied by the ancient Pueblo people between the 6 th and 12 th centuries.

Thousands of carefully engineered Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings and archeological sites at this historic site offer an extraordinary snapshot into the lives of the people who lived here for over 700 years.

Olympic National Park

One of the most ecologically diverse parks in the U.S., Olympic National Park located in northwestern Washington State includes a rugged undeveloped coastline, a lush and enchanting temperate rain forest, picturesque alpine mountains and glacier-capped peaks, all within the same protected area and within a day's drive of one another.

The impressive diversity throughout the park's 922,000 acres makes it feel as though you're visiting three separate and unique parks in one.

Taos Pueblo

One of the most unforgettable UNESCO Heritage Sites is Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Ringed by the soaring peaks and sagebrush plains of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, this authentic Native American community with no electricity or running water has been continuously inhabited for over 1,000 years. The ancient Tiwa language is still spoken here.

The largest of the Pueblos was established along the Rio Grande and its headwaters in the late 13 th and early 14 th centuries. Taos Pueblo is renowned for its multi-story adobe structures built entirely from earth, straw, and water, and then coated with a smooth layer of mud plaster.

Yellowstone

Designated as the world's first national park in 1872, Yellowstone covers almost 3,500 square miles throughout Wyoming and parts of Montana and Idaho. Geothermal features include over 300 geysers, hot springs, canyons, waterfalls, mud pots and fumaroles.

One of the most spectacular of the UNESCO Heritage Sites in the U.S., Yellowstone sits atop a massive volcanic caldera, one of the largest active volcanic systems on Earth. The magma chamber below the park still fuels over 10,000 hydrothermal features making the area the world's most concentrated area of geysers and hot springs. Old Faithful, the park's icon erupts every 90 minutes, shooting water up to 130 feet in the air. Grand Prismatic Spring, the largest hot spring in the U.S. is renowned for its surreal rainbow colors and Mammoth Hot Springs' terraced limestone formations resemble frozen waterfalls.

Yosemite National Park

Located in California's Sierra Nevada mountains, the stunning park is known for its granite cliffs (El Capitan and Half Dome), waterfalls, giant sequoias and picturesque valleys, making it a bucket-list destination for photographers, nature lovers, hikers and climbers.

Yosemite Falls is one of North America's tallest cascades at 2,425 feet, signature Bridalveil Falls can be seen at the valley entrance, and located along the Mist Trail, Vernal & Nevada Falls can be accessed by a hike. Some of the park's giant sequoias are over 3,000 years old and among the largest living things on Earth.

TRAVEL TIPS

Flying without a Real ID? It could cost you $18 and a trip through a new screening process

Travelers who attempt to fly without a Real ID or a passport could be subject to a new airport security screening program that carries an $18 fee.

On Thursday, the TSA announced another option for travelers who have yet to get their Real ID or are flying without their passport: the modernized alternative identity-verification program.

The proposed program will use a new biometric kiosk system to verify identification before the traveler is permitted to pass through the TSA checkpoint, according to a notice posted on the Federal Register.

This option does not guarantee an individual will be granted access beyond the checkpoint and into the airport. To address the costs associated with the program, the TSA will require participants to pay an $18 fee, which then allows them to pass through airport security checkpoints for 10 days.

Biometrics uses physical characteristics to verify identity. The TSA already uses such methods for verifying digital IDS and for facial comparison.

Travelers who undergo the program screening may be subject to additional screening or experience delays.

It's unclear if and when the new system and accompanying $18 fee will be implemented.

The TSA did not respond to The Times' request for comment by the time of publication.

In a statement, the TSA said, "This notice serves as a next step in the process in REAL ID compliance, which was signed into law more than 20 years ago and finally implemented by Secretary [Kristi] Noem as of May 2025. TSA is working with stakeholders and partners to ensure both security and efficiency at our checkpoints. Additional guidance will be announced in the coming days."

The newest program comes six months after TSA finally began enforcing its Real ID deadline, with mixed results. Since May 7, travelers who plan to board a domestic flight are required to show the federally compliant Real ID or another approved form of identification such as a passport to pass through airport security.

– *Karen Garcia* / Los Angeles Times (TNS)